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THE MONTH

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LOUGH DERG IN DONEGAL

Ireland's National Pilgrimage

SIR SHANE LESLIE

THE MONK OF FARNE

HUGH FARMER

**CHRISTOPHER SMART
AND THE SEVEN PILLARS**

CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN

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LOUGH DERG IN DONEGAL

Ireland's National Pilgrimage

By

SIR SHANE LESLIE

CATHOLIC COUNTRIES boast national pilgrimages on a growing scale, and though there is none to equal the vast numbers who find their way to Lourdes, Ireland can point to a growing national pilgrimage which is about to attain its climax at least in relations between lords of the soil and spiritual claimants.

English Catholics have never shown particular interest in so Irish a tradition, which is almost Celtic in the severity called upon pilgrims to endure. "Lough Derg" is the modern term for a pilgrimage which the Middle Ages and centuries before knew as "St. Patrick's Purgatory." Lough Derg is a misleading term for English readers, especially as handbooks and encyclopaedias are inclined to refer the "Purgatory" to the bigger and more prominent Lough Derg which lies between the Counties of Tipperary and Galway, whereas the Lough Derg associated with St. Patrick lies in Donegal but close to the boundaries of Fermanagh and Tyrone.

In the primitive period it is possible, in the opinion of a great Irish scholar like John O'Donovan, that the lake was called Lough Geirc, the Lake of the Cave. The medieval legends and travellers' tales all concentrate on a cave—a cleft in an island of the lake which was believed to lead down to the geographical Purgatory on which Dante based his epic. But in English or governmental ordnance it became Derg, the Red Lake. For this description more than one suggestion was given. First of all, it was coloured reddish by the peat-water. Secondly, it referred to the blood shed on the spot when the mighty Fianna (mythical Fenians) led by Fionn and Oscar and Ossian held their hunting at Lough Derg and slew the serpent or monster of the lake. To

this celebrated sporting occasion Ossian dedicated one of his lays. The whole neighbourhood remained rich in folklore and legend until the most recent times. The old pagan saga passed like the elder faiths of the Irish into the Patrician creed, and whether St. Patrick's feet ever touched the shores of the lake, the stones on the waterbrink of Station Island, the present scene of the full-fledged pilgrimage, show markings described as those of St. Patrick's blessed feet. Not far away are immense stones which were believed to be the fossilised remains of the monster slain by the Fenian brethren.

But archaeology and manuscript point out that that was not the only island deserving of veneration in the lake. A mile to the north-west of Station Island lies the ten-acred green blob across the distance known as Saint's Island. This island was known in Irish as St. Daveoc's, an early Patrician saint and hermit. On this island the Anglo-Normans introduced a priory of Augustinian Canons. Like all the legends and customs these Catholic invaders adopted, they took over Lough Derg and thanks to their enthusiasm introduced the name of the lake to Christendom associated with the astonishing possibility of a kind of spiritual volcanic link between the surface of Earth and the half-way Purgatorial house which certainly agreed with the doctrine of poets as well as philosophers. The adventurous, the believers, the optimistic and the penitential of all countries solemnly hoped there was such a place. Some imaginative travellers and pious monks between them created the first and most widespread of medieval thrillers. No medieval library was without visions and experiences of this other world which could be penetrated by the living in a remote corner of the most remote island of Christendom. Hardly a great collection of manuscripts today lacks one of these Irish visions.

The scene and ceremony were early set. The monks did not invite the pious but the more appalling sinners who like Tannhauser in another Celtic story was refused absolution by the Pope himself. Wealthy and powerful penitents found their way in the course of a journey across Europe to Lough Derg. They bore letters from their spiritual or temporal lords which they showed to the Bishop of Clogher and Prior of Lough Derg. They were solemnly warned of the dangers which beset them if they descended into the cave which entailed ten days and nights

before the Prior descended to unlock them from captivity. As no chance could be taken, a pilgrim lay on the chapel floor clothed with an alb and enjoyed the unique experience of hearing the monks chant his funeral service. This *prae-mortem* liturgy apparently occurs nowhere else in Christendom and must have had a very salutary influence even apart from the subsequent entry into the cave in which the Prior locked the door.

Survival was possible, to judge from the number of pilgrims from different countries who lived to record their experiences. Apart from their well-merited absolution, they returned like the heroes of later voyages and explorations to write accounts which there were none to check or to deny. It became an accepted tradition that this material connection existed between the two worlds; it passed into legend upon legend and finally inspired Dante to write the greatest of all medieval epics. The parallels between Knight Owen's adventures in St. Patrick's Purgatory have been drawn with the direct text of the *Inferno* of Dante.

There can be no doubt that this corner of desolate Donegal was better known to Europe at one time than any other corner of Ireland. Belfast was only a geographical expression in Gaelic. The Giant's Causeway and the Blarney Stone were unknown to tourists who were also unknown except for such as courageously made way through the Fews or mountainy forests south of Armagh or the wilder districts north. It was from a northerly direction that the Papal Nuncio Chiericati, accredited to Henry VIII, found direction to Lough Derg and wrote a most fascinating but cautious letter to Isabella d'Este describing his stay on Station Island while his companions performed the penances and exercises under cover.

The archaeological problem of St. Patrick's Purgatory lies in the existence of two islands of very different character at a mile's distance in the middle of the lake. Saint's Island (originally St. Daveoc's Island) is ten acres and is approximate to the western mainland close enough to be joined by a causeway. Here the Augustinian Canons undoubtedly settled and built from the days of the Norman invasion. These religious adventurers who took over Ireland under the impression that they were carrying out a papal behest, took over not only territory but legend, intermarried with Irish chieftainry and transfigured the old saints. St. Patrick they made known in all phases to Christendom

and his Purgatory seemed the most astonishing of his connections with the spiritual to advertise to all lands. Their success was startling, and Saint's Island to this day shows traces of their priory, chapel and gardens, above all the hidden corner where some ten steps led from the chapel into the famous cave.

At an uncertain time St. Patrick's Island, barely a half-acre of rock in the middle of the lake, took over the penances and sanctities of Saint's Island, and as it became a religious station, is so called to this day. The stony beds devoted to prayer and worn smooth by the bare-footed pilgrims exist there till today, but the representative of the cave, in which pilgrims passed a night's vigil throughout historic times, has been a chapel within recent years, only glorified into a minor basilica and consecrated by the late Papal Nuncio Archbishop Paschal Robinson. The pilgrimage also has grown numerically from hundreds every year to thousands and from thousands to tens of thousands.

In medieval times all nationalities were numbered in the literary travellers, Hungarian, Spanish, French, Italian. It was not until later that the Irish realised what an astounding wonder lay in their own bounds. With the wars, massacres, struggles and penalisations which befell Ireland, Lough Derg became a sanctuary, a sacred Zion, a national Mecca. Disasters and destructions only endeared the place to national sympathy. It is true that confusion was caused at the end of the fifteenth century when the existence of two islands each with a cave and a penitential outfit came to the notice of the Pope, Alexander VI. A Dutch monk, obviously visiting Saint's Island, descended into the cave, and though no doubt he suffered whatever penance he deserved, he was disappointed by his failure to see the spectres, spirits and demons which had been reported by previous and more successful visitors. His report convinced the Pope that something was wrong, and the Holy See ordered that the cave should be closed. This was properly apologised for in the Irish Annals by the explanation that this was the wrong cave. There was no protest or anger at the papal edict, for the other island had long been in full swing. Not only the stone beds but stone relics and a copy of the old cave had been brought to St. Patrick's Island. A carefully detailed map in the *Lyra Hibernica* dating from 1666 shows this facsimile cave much as facsimile grottoes of Lourdes are to be found all over the world conveying the

same spiritual results as pilgrims secure by journeying into the Pyrenees.

The island and the cave have appeared on all Irish maps from the earliest in manuscripts in the Italian libraries to the British ordnance surveys. Even more so have they found mention in authors: Calderon, Marie de France (full *Lai*, a verified account of the Knight Owen's tale in Latin), Ariosto, Southey, William Carleton, to say nothing of a mention in the Roman Breviary for a short period. The most striking allusion in English occurs in Shakespeare, in a scene when Hamlet and Horatio are sparring with the ghost (*more Catholico* a soul in Purgatory) and Hamlet invokes St. Patrick (his only mention in the works). Whom else could he invoke on such an occasion, since neither England nor Denmark could boast any saint with protective power over Purgatory?

The civil authorities struck hard at the buildings left on either island in the curious supposition that by hacking down the symbols of one branch of Christianity another branch would immediately blossom. The English government was steadily adverse, but it is interesting to read that while one Queen of England, Henrietta Maria, wrote (indeed with the good wishes of Charles I) in favour of preserving the pilgrimage, it was under Queen Anne that shattering blows were delivered to obliterate what seemed to Anglican colonialism a debased superstition.

However, the superstition has survived in a most ascetic and penitential form, while it is the official state religion and Queen Anne which have disappeared at least on the shores of Lough Derg in Donegal.

THE MONK OF FARNE

By

HUGH FARMER

THE FARNE MEDITATIONS,¹ written in Latin, are the work of a Benedictine monk of Durham, who became a hermit on the island of the Inner Farne off the Northumberland coast about the middle of the fourteenth century. From the convergence of various scraps of evidence in the Durham and Farne Account Rolls, it seems that he should be identified with John Whiterig who became a monk of Durham c. 1350, was Novice-Master for several years from 1356, settled at Farne in 1363 and died there in 1371, probably at the age of less than fifty. These meditations are his only surviving writings, and they tell us most of the little we know of his life and personality.

In his youth he had studied at Oxford and narrowly escaped death by drowning in the River Cherwell. Perhaps it was then that by his own account he shared to excess the current taste for "fables." A further reference to the Black Death, more probably the epidemics of 1361-2 or 1368-9 than the more famous one of 1349, and an allusion to his being the inhabitant of an island while he was writing, all but complete the scanty biographical data we know of him.

He lived during an eventful period of history. The Church was ruled by the popes of Avignon, England (for most of his life) by Edward III. Relations between Church and state were difficult, but in practice a *modus vivendi* was found. Ecclesiastical

¹ The single extant manuscript of these meditations, in a good hand of the later fourteenth century, is in the Durham Cathedral Library. The meditations were first described by J. Raine, *North Durham*, 1843, pp. 343 ff., and more recently by W. A. Pantin, "The Monk Solitary of Farne," *English Historical Review*, May 1944, pp. 162-86. The Latin text was published in full by the present writer in *Analecta Monastica*, Studia Anselmiana, Rome, IV (1955), pp. 141-245; and an English translation by the Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey is shortly to be published by Messrs. Darton, Longman and Todd. The present article, which includes material from the Introduction to this book, is published with their kind permission.

controversies were numerous: at Oxford seculars and mendicants disputed about the legitimacy of ecclesiastical ownership, the basis of jurisdiction, and the nature of dominion and grace, until all united against Wyclif's heretical teaching on the Eucharist. At Durham itself in 1346, the year of Crecy, a Scottish invading army had been heavily defeated at Neville's Cross, just outside the town, and the Black Rood of Scotland captured and placed in the cathedral, where it remained until the Reformation. Spasmodic border warfare by land and sea continued, however, for the greater part of Whiterig's life.

The fourteenth century was not in all respects an age of decadence and strife: the mystical writings produced during it both in England and on the Continent surpassed in quantity and quality those of any other medieval century. It was the age of Tauler and Suso, Hilton and Rolle, Juliana of Norwich and the author of the *Cloud*. Although Whiterig had certain affinities with some of these writers, his outlook was rather different from theirs, for he represented, in the main, the traditional way of the Black Benedictine of the cloister, and his thought was based very closely on Scripture, the Liturgy and the Fathers.

Durham cathedral priory in the fourteenth century was perhaps at the highest peak of success. It recovered quickly from the Black Death and had a learned and able prior in John Fossor, and a theologian of national importance in Uthred of Boldon. The splendid tomb and throne of Bishop Hatfield is symbolic of the magnificence and generosity of one who considerably enlarged Durham Castle and endowed Durham College at Oxford for the monks. The cathedral itself was enriched with large new windows and the Neville screen, while new monastic buildings were also erected, the most famous of them, the monks' dormitory, being begun soon after Whiterig's death. The Durham community, with several dependent cells in the North, numbering perhaps a hundred monks in all, occupied a high social position in the land, and the Northern magnates sent their sons to be educated in the Prior's household.

It was perhaps partly in reaction against this splendour that Whiterig retired as a solitary to the austere and bleak Inner Farne, following in the footsteps of St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert in the seventh century and St. Bartholomew of Farne in the twelfth. In so doing he was also following a slender but persistent tradition

in Benedictine monasteries, of which such famous abbeys as Cluny, St. Albans and Westminster provided examples. But the urge to the eremitical life did not only belong to the past. In the fourteenth century English Carthusian monasteries increased from two to seven in number, while a number of other religious, notably Dominicans in the North, are known to have lived as solitaries. Traces of at least seven hermits, laymen or priests, have been found in Northumberland at this date, and another seven in Durham, to whom the priors used to give alms. But the total number of hermits and anchorites there was probably very much greater.

Farne itself had long been used as a hermitage by Durham monks. Geoffrey of Coldingham's life of St. Bartholomew of Farne described it as "formerly the fortress of devils but now a cloister and a school for saints. It is a kind of Purgatory on earth, suitably established for healing souls and bodies. It always contains, indeed it actually forms, men of virtue, for when someone is led by the Spirit into the desert he must expect to be tempted by the devil. As a consequence he either cultivates sanctity or else leaves this holy place."

Its material conditions, especially in winter, were such as to ensure the survival only of the physically and spiritually fittest, but in summer, perhaps Whiterig would write his meditations on the cliff-tops, with the birds and the sea for company, in the intervals between his duties of prayer and work. The latter included cutting wood, presumably washed up by the sea, and the records mention boats belonging to the Farne Monks who fished from them with both net and line. They supplemented their rather meagre endowments with the sale of seals, porpoises and other fish as well as eider-duck eggs.

Seven in number and of unequal length and quality, the Farne meditations form a coherent whole which reveals their author as one whose outlook was completely centred on the Person of Christ and who, while being a sturdy traditionalist, was also sensitive to the more affective piety of his own day. His very choice of meditations as his literary form is significant. These had been popularised by writers of the twelfth century like St. Anselm and John of Fécamp and can be contrasted with the later and more elaborate productions favoured by St. Edmund of Canterbury, John Mirk and others. Also typical of his deep

roots in the past are his very frequent use of the Bible and texts from the Fathers and the Liturgy, which are woven together with great skill somewhat in the style of St. Bernard, who indeed was probably the greatest non-Scriptural influence upon him. His affinity with other writers of his age may be seen especially in his tender devotion to the Crucified Christ, which is nevertheless restrained and far from the sentimentality of certain other writers of the later Middle Ages. These features, together with his emphasis on doctrine rather than on sentiment, tend to give to his writings a timeless rather than a "period" flavour and should be attractive to readers of our own day.

The first of the seven meditations, addressed to Christ Crucified, is nearly twice as long as all the others put together, and is also the most important. A miniature treatise on the spiritual life, its principal theme is God's love for men, revealed especially by Christ's death on the Cross, which requires man's total love in return as the only attitude befitting a redeemed creature. This meditation is also the key to the others which work out the author's thought about Our Lady, the Angels and his favourite saints, all of whom have already been mentioned at some length in the first one. It seems likely that it was written first.

This meditation falls naturally into three main parts. After an introductory chapter, the author addresses Christ under a series of Old Testament types, including Adam, Abel, Noah, Isaac, Joseph, Samson and David. Here especially biblical citations abound, perhaps excessively. The most important chapter of the section presents God's Son speaking to the Father on our behalf and expressing His readiness to undergo the Incarnation in order to fight and conquer the devil, a patristic rather than an Anselmian presentation. Then follows the first of several verse passages, presumably by the author, which form an unusual feature of these writings.

The second part of this meditation is a direct consideration of the crucified Christ from several different points of view. His sufferings of varied torments for our sake are listed with deep sympathy and reverence. In return Christ asks for man's heart and his love, and this response should be complete.

I know well, Lord, that thou desirest my whole self when thou askest for my heart, and I seek thy whole self when I beg for thee. I know too, Lord, that thou wishest to possess me entirely in order

that thou mayest be entirely possessed thyself, and this thou dost for my sake, not for thine own.

The devout soul is visited by Christ with extraordinary sweetness and joy; such experiences gave surpassing strength to the martyrs and saints of old. These examples of the triumph of divine grace lead on to a brief consideration of predestination and the danger of blindness of heart and ingratitude, shown especially by lack of charity and preferring creatures to the Creator. Nevertheless none should despair of God's mercy. The sacraments of baptism and penance were instituted to enable us to return to God. Christ has given us a sign of hope. That sign is Himself, with arms extended on the Cross to embrace man and draw him to union with Himself. In comparison with knowing this sign of Christ crucified, other knowledge is rather ignorance.

The meaning of the sign of Christ crucified is then explained according to the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical senses. Allegorically the outstretched arms represent the Law and the Prophets or the two Testaments. Morally we are led into the heart of Christ to be united with Him who by a word created the universe. Anagogically the right hand signifies eternity, the left hand riches and glory in this present world, through which the Church passes to enjoy the embrace of her bridegroom in heaven.

Then the author exhorts the reader to draw near in spite of his unworthiness and learn to read the open book of the Saviour's body on the Cross. The letters of this book are His wounds; the words are His actions and sufferings. Knowledge of this book is necessary for salvation, a deep knowledge of assimilation obtained by metaphorical eating and digesting, which will lead us by penance to complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

In the two following chapters occur the culminating points of this section of the meditation. The author sees the events of his past life as the expression of God's merciful love on his behalf:

Thou, sweet Jesus, art all my good: thou art my ability in work and eloquence in conversation, my proficiency in study and achievement in enterprise, my consolation in adversity and caution in prosperity. Whichever way I turn, thy grace and mercy go before me, and often when it seemed that all was over with me, thou didst suddenly deliver me. Thou didst bring me back when I went astray and instruct me in my ignorance; thou didst correct me in my sin, console me in my sorrow and comfort me in my despair.

During a crisis caused by this despair the author experienced a vision of Christ Himself, who consoled him.

O Lord of hosts, Jesus most lovable, what caused thee to be so solicitous in my regard that thou hast not only willed that the heart of thy servant should experience that delightful, hidden presence, which overflows with fullness of joy and avails for love's close embraces, not only chosen to give me that hope which thou givest to other sons of the Church through patience and the consolation of the Scriptures? That wouldst not suffice thee, but over and above it all thou must needs teach me, not through Thy beloved evangelist John who proffered my petition to thee, but with thine own mouth, how I could be saved on the day of Judgment; for that was my petition. Merrily and with mild countenance thou didst call out in reply : "Love, and thou shalt be saved."

The section concludes with a prayer of confidence that as Christ has given this pledge to the writer, so He will deign to lead him further towards the heights: "Perfect, good Jesus, what thou hast wrought in me . . . what I ask for is exceedingly great and sublime, and can only be reached by degrees."

The mention of the degrees of love leads on to the third part of the meditation which is a description of the spiritual life seen as the progressive ascending of these various degrees by the faithful soul. Although the author nowhere says, "Love is repaid by love alone," this saying of the best-known modern saint does sum up the thought of the monk of Farne. And like St. Bernard, whose influence in this section is both obvious and dominant, Whiterig saw the development of the spiritual life in terms of the progress of charity. "St. Bernard," wrote one of his modern disciples, "wrote no treatise on mysticism; for him mysticism is quite simply the last rung on the ladder of charity. . . . St. Bernard's mysticism is not a function of mental prayer, it is simply a perfect participation in the love which God has for himself: *sic affici deificari est*." The Monk of Farne cited and made his own many of the fundamental texts of St. Bernard's mystical teaching, and the same principles of interpretation should be applied to each. It may be remarked that nowhere does the monk of Farne make a division of the spiritual life into two sections, "ordinary," and "extraordinary" or "mystical," but clearly sees the unfolding of the life of grace and charity as one single process with the highest degree of charity (including mystical experience)

at the end. Of his own experience he says little beyond the passage already cited. But he envisaged the highest degree of charity as something within range of his practical aspirations as well as of his speculative thought.

The progress of the soul towards God is traced through the early stages of what St. Bernard called carnal love of Christ by means of hearing of Christ and mortification. There follow the stages of a more rational love: study of Christ, joy and unworldliness reached through trying always to do what pleases Christ, whatever the consequences and in all circumstances. To these stages correspond the precept to love God *toto corde* and *tota anima*; to love *tota virtute* corresponds a third stage of unitive love, characterised by extreme ardour combined with liberty, by distaste for the present life and finally by a certain loss of the use of the senses, and even by death through charity rather than through any particular disease. This phenomenon was also described by St. John of the Cross.

As he could not witness to such an event from his own experience, Whiterig made use of the evidence of other writers. First of all he cites the relevant stanzas of the long lyrical poem *Philomena* by Archbishop Pecham, which describes the death of the nightingale as a figure of the death of a spiritual person from the love of God. Another example is given in a delightful story of a medieval solitary, told in a revelation that a certain girl in a distant province was predestined to the same degree of glory as himself. When he went to visit her he found that she appeared to do nothing extraordinary either in her devotions or in her austerities, but that she was a virgin who had dedicated herself to the love of God in great and continual joy. During the hermit's visit she died from no other apparent cause. Further descriptions of this highest degree of divine love are cited from standard authors, especially from Hugh of St. Victor. Our Lady and St. John are evoked as examples of saints who were spared the martyrdom of the sword so that they could die as martyrs of divine love. The author then expresses the wish that he might be guided in the spiritual life by one who had experienced its highest degrees, and sees in the lives of such souls the vindication of the Incarnation and Passion of Christ.

I know, Lord, and I know it well and truly that from all eternity thou didst foresee such as would be wounded by the darts of thy

love, and so thou didst take flesh. To redeem them thou didst choose to die, not that they had merited thine incarnation and death, as though anyone had first given to thee and afterwards thou hadst repaid him, but it was rather by virtue of thy death that they were able to do what thou didst from all eternity foresee they would do. Thus thy death . . . was itself the cause and origin of every meritorious act whatsoever.

The meditation ends with a prayer in prose and verse for present needs and final perseverance.

In this, the longest of the meditations, the chief characteristics of the author's spirituality and style are to be found. His personal devotion to Christ and his frequent representations of the wisdom of the past as expressed in Scripture, the Liturgy and the Fathers have already been noted. He relies on the soundest teachers rather than on his own experience, and this is not surprising in view of his comparative youth and limited knowledge. His doctrinal emphasis and his disciplined restraint, together with his taste for traditional spiritual wisdom, are almost certainly characteristic of the monastery which formed him.

We may also note his special prayer for the Durham community to which he still belonged, and it is perhaps significant that there is no specifically eremitical tendency expressed in his writings. Nor is there even a description of his own surroundings or a passage in praise of solitude. He tells us nothing of his abandonment of the amenities of Durham for the bleak austerity of Farne, and only as *obiter dicta* does he let fall a few scraps of information about his former life. Like many other monks before and since, he was more concerned with Christ than with spiritual autobiography, with sound doctrine than the description of his experiences.

In contrast to the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, he shows no trace of the negative or so-called Dionysian approach to contemplation. His experience of prayer appeared to be through the formulae of the Liturgy, fed by assiduous meditation on the text of Holy Scripture. In contrast to Margery Kempe and even to Methley there seems to have been nothing unbalanced or overwrought about him. In contrast to Rolle, he considered the Passion not in terms of the bursting out from Christ's limbs of the Precious Blood, but instead he compares the honour shown to the sacred Head by angels with the insults and sufferings inflicted on it by men on Calvary. Here he was perhaps

nearer to St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure than to some of his contemporaries.

But by his treatment of the Sacred Heart the author deserves a small place among the spiritual writers from St. Gertrude to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque who propagated this devotion, sometimes wrongly regarded as a product of Counter-Reformation spirituality. Whiterig wrote of the Sacred Heart as a refuge of sinners:

Precisely because I am a sinner, I have fled to thee, since there is nowhere I can flee from thee save to thee . . . I will run to my Lord as he beckons me to come and by touching him, I shall be cleaned from all impurity of body and soul . . . I will enter into thee and not stay without, for outside thee there is no salvation . . . Kind, humble heart, allow me to hide with thee from the face of the Lord's anger, for he is coming to judge the world. If thou chooseth the left side, then let me remain on the right: Christ's body is not so strait that it cannot hold us both at once. So let us make here two tabernacles, one for thee and one for me, and there will still be room for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to take their places, together with all those who follow their way of life. And the heart of Jesus answers me: "If thou didst not desire to dwell with me, I would not have allowed thee to enter here. But now, since it is my delight to dwell with the sons of men, I will not cast out him that cometh to me. Where I am, there let him be whom I love and by whom I am loved."

Whiterig gives the impression of a sane, holy and well-adjusted person. One point which illustrates this is his admirable balance between compunction and joy. He had neither the gloom of the Puritan nor the neglect of repentance, so common in our own day. Other passages already cited are sufficient evidence for his compunction; the following shows his thought on joy:

Cheerfulness adds just as much to our actions as action adds to a right intention, for cheerfulness in the doer is at once both a sign and an effect of a loving heart, and if we have not got that, all that we do goes awry.

Lastly it may be asked whether the monk of Farne was anti-intellectual: in some passages he attacks those who prefer knowledge to piety, in others he exalts the kind of knowledge which cannot come from books. But parallels to these passages can be found *mutatis mutandis* in the Fathers, and even St. Thomas

Aquinas praised the old woman who knew more about the immortality of the soul than the philosophers. In fact the theme is almost perennial, and can be traced back to St. Paul's teaching on the wisdom of this world contrasted with that of Christ crucified. St. Bernard too had written in similar vein; each was representative of monastic spirituality on the relation between learning and charity.

Both would have agreed that reading and meditation, especially of Holy Scripture, are a preparation for contemplation; if they are to be fruitful, continual effort at penetration and memorising must be made. But in moments of contemplation all images are suspended, and the soul adheres to the Mystery of God without being able to explain it. Whiterig cites St. Gregory's aphorism, that love is itself a kind of knowledge, and the words of Ambrose Autpert: "If we seek to understand thee, we do not discover thee as thou art; it is by love alone that thou art attained." William of St. Thierry, among others, taught the same. In so doing, he and others were representative of monastic spiritual writers, who combined a just appreciation of the primacy of charity in contemplation, with a proportionate emphasis on the importance of the preparatory intellectual element of *lectio divina*. St. Bernard did not want his monks to be foolish, and every page of the Farne meditations is witness to our author's assiduity in sacred reading. Neither would have supported a cult of ignorance or encouraged the suppression of intellectual activity in spiritual matters, but both recommend the simplification of intellectual activity in harmony with an asceticism which should lead to perfect union of God by charity. But meditation on the truths of faith through *lectio divina* is its normally indispensable preliminary.

The meditations to the saints share the same general outlook as that to Christ crucified, of which indeed they may be considered the completion. In that work warnings were given against the undue exaltation of any creature:

Therefore do not by your love make for yourself a god of any one save him alone who loved us so greatly when we did not as yet exist. I do not forbid the love of the saints, but I do desire that right order should be kept in loving them.

This admirable recommendation was doubtless kept by the

author; but there is one passage in the meditation to Our Lady which seems to contradict it. Misled by a text attributed to St. Augustine, Whiterig, whose intentions were perfectly orthodox, fell into inaccuracies of language. Taken out of its context the sentence "The flesh of Mary is God and may be adored without blame" would be condemned as heretical. But when we look into the context of such an astonishing statement we find that the phrase "the flesh of Mary" is used of the humanity of Christ, not of the flesh of Mary's own body. It means, as the author says, "the flesh which thou dost possess in thy son, for it will never cease to be thine own flesh since he will never cease to be thine own son." Such an explanation exonerates him from any evil or erroneous intention, but his choice of language was, to say the least, unfortunate. In the same meditation he described the sanctification of Mary at the Annunciation by the Holy Spirit as including the elimination of "every trace of original sin in thee." At the time when the author wrote this the Immaculate Conception was not a dogma, but a matter of theological opinion. Scotists insisted on the unique privileges accorded to the Mother of God, while Thomists insisted rather on the need of every creature, Mary included, for the grace of Redemption, accomplished through the death of her Son on the Cross. Each side had one aspect of the truth, and what was good in each was included in the definitive settlement of the controversy by the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pius IX in 1854.

On the subject of the angels the author's personal affective outlook is again very much in evidence, and his meditation forms a notable addition to the series of medieval prayers to the angels collected by Dom Wilmart. It is also closely connected with an English prayer to the Guardian Angel preserved in another Durham manuscript book of meditations:

Myn angel that art to me ysend
Fro God to be my Governour,
Fro all yvyl thu me defend
In every dyssese be my succour.

This meditation, which contains most of his meagre autobiographical data, is also one in which the author recalls the theological teaching he had received years ago, and shows sufficient interest in disputed points to opt for the opinion of Peter the

Lombard and St. Thomas on the angels' spirituality and for that of St. Gregory and St. Bernard on the role of the Seraphim and other higher angels.

The meditation on David and Abraham is more unusual in its subject-matter, and is written evidence for the devotion to the patriarchs and prophets so often shown in medieval sculpture, stained glass and miniature painting. In the early chapters of the meditation to Christ Crucified the patriarchs were seen as types of Christ and David as a type of the Church, but now, they are studied rather as models respectively of repentance and obedience. Both are invoked in face of the "misery and pestilence by which we are afflicted." Also worthy of note is the author's supposition that Adam had lived for only six hours before the Fall, an opinion much nearer St. Irenaeus' "child Adam" than St. Thomas' picture of a perfect adult man. On a less serious level we may also notice, apropos of a jocular use of words of the Psalter in an accommodated sense:

Any comedian, out to raise a laugh in his audience, would find passages from the psalms, did he but know them and care to make use of them to enhance his performance; though to debase such sacred mystic words to such profanities would be no slight sin.

The final meditation on St. Cuthbert is unfortunately incomplete. It might have told us more both about Durham and about hermit life on Farne. But it is perhaps most reasonable to suppose that death overtook John Whiterig before he could complete it, that, worn out by the austerity of the Farne hermitage, he passed while still young to that perfect love of God whose earlier stages he had already described in the meditation to Christ Crucified.

To the contemporary reader the timeless elements of the Farne meditations will appeal, even if the mode of expression, which would have pleased the presumably monastic readers he wrote for, is occasionally unfamiliar or wearisome. The cult of Christ crucified and devotion to the saints who modelled their lives on His are as necessary and desirable today as in the fourteenth century. The degrees of the love of God have not changed since then, nor are the sacrifices necessary to attain its heights any less taxing: the exigencies of the Gospel do not change from one age to another. His strongly Scriptural interests will appeal to the present age of the revival of Biblical studies, the balanced

outlook manifest in his writings throws fresh light on the mentality of the late medieval cloistered monk. But most appealing of all are the many expressions of his personal relationship with God: "Give me thy self," he says, "and the rest take for thyself. Whatever there is besides thee does not satisfy me without thee, nor hast thou any gift to bestow which I desire so much as thee."

Remember, sweet Jesus, whom I seek to please, that it is Thee I desire to love above all. Make me joyfully to fulfil thy commands so that I may see thy face for ever, and deal with me so mercifully before I die that I may know that I love nothing so much as God. May I be protected by thy hand from all present evils, and find firm support in the sign of victory! Ward off famine, foe and plague, grant us all-pervading peace, and for the sake of tranquillity cause brethren to be of one mind. Put an end to wars, keep far from us the deadly injury of sin; and lest souls rush headlong to perdition, be thou to us a tower of strength!

CHRISTOPHER SMART AND THE SEVEN PILLARS

By

CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN

ROBERT BROWNING was the first person to draw public attention to the intricate beauty of design in *A Song to David* by Christopher Smart (1722-71). He compared the clustering of the stanzas to the pattern of a great cathedral: "... the radiant images that adorn stanzas xviii-xxvi give the impression of nine leaded windows . . . four on each side of the church and a rose over the entrance"; in the centre "we see seven pillars finely carved . . ."; the last fifteen stanzas, which exalt five splendours of creation and of David in particular as the type of Christ, are like "five statues on the pinnacle that crowns the church."

Since Browning's day, and increasingly in the last few years, commentators have discovered many more intricate patterns in

the *Song to David*. But no one so far has been able to offer any explanation of the central passage about the seven pillars of wisdom. Here are the stanzas, beautiful in the lucidity of their diction, yet still mysterious in content:

The pillars of the Lord are seven
Which stand from earth to topmost heaven;
His wisdom drew the plan;
His WORD accomplished the design
From brightest gem to deepest mine,
From CHRIST enthroned to man.

Alpha, the cause of causes, first
In station, fountain, whence the burst
Of light and blaze of day;
Whence bold attempt, and brave advance,
Have motion, life and ordinance,
And heaven itself its stay.

Gamma supports the glorious arch
On which angelic legions march,
And is with sapphires paved;
Thence the fleet clouds are sent adrift,
And thence the painted folds, that lift
The crimson veil, are waved.

Eta with living sculpture breathes,
With verdant carvings, flowery wreathes
Of never-wasting bloom;
In strong relief his goodly base
All instruments of labour grace,
The trowel, spade and loom.

Next Theta stands to the Supreme—
Who formed in number, sign and scheme
The illustrious lights that are;
And one addressed his saffron robe,
And one, clad in a silver globe,
Held rule with every star.

Iota's tuned to choral hymns
Of him that flies, while he that swims
In thankful safety lurks;
And foot, and chapitre, and niche,
The various histories enrich
Of God's recorded works.

Sigma presents the social droves,
 With him that solitary roves
 And man of all the chief;
 Fair on whose face, and stately frame,
 Did God impress His hallowed name
 For ocular belief.

OMEGA! GREATEST and the BEST
 Stands sacred to the day of rest,
 For gratitude and thought;
 Which blessed the world upon his pole,
 And gave the universe his goal,
 And closed the infernal draught.

The main reference is to *Proverbs*, ix, 1, ("Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars"); and Smart's application of the text is given by himself in a short note: "shews that the pillars of knowledge were the monuments of God's work in the first week"; he has made each of the pillars represent one of the seven days in the beginning of *Genesis*. But no one has offered any satisfactory explanation of the seven Greek letters assigned to the seven days—*A, Γ, H, Θ, I, Σ, Ω*,—nor of the many lines in the stanzas which seem to go beyond the works of the first week. (For example, the last line—"And closed the infernal draught"—seems clearly to refer to the "harrowing of hell" done by Christ when "he descended into hell" between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.)

As Mr. Robert Brittain, the most recent editor of the poem, writes, "All readers of the poem have been puzzled by these letters, but no one since the poet's day has offered any explanation." The explanation offered in the poet's day, by an anonymous critic in the *Monthly Review* of 1763, was as follows:

These, we conjecture, are made choice of as consecrated for the following reasons. *Alpha* and *Omega*, from a well-known text in the Revelation. *Iota*, *Eta*, and *Sigma* because they are used to signify our Saviour, on altars and pulpits. *Theta*, as being the initial of God and *Gamma*, as denoting the number *Three*, held sacred by some Christians.

Obviously the explanation is correct for the first and last letters which begin and end the book of *Revelation* (or the *Apocalypse*). Equally obviously, it does not explain the intermediate letters at all. If Smart had wanted to write the three

Greek letters denoting the holy name of Jesus, he would have done so in the proper order; he would not have jumbled them up as they are—eta, iota, theta, sigma—with a gap in between the last two. And why should "God" be assigned to only one particular day of His creation? The explanation makes no sense as a whole nor of the individual letters except the first and the last, *alpha* and *omega*.

The difficulty in elucidating this sort of cryptogram is the usual one: *qui nimis probat, nihil probat*: there might be a hundred explanations all equally possible and equally pointless. The only hope is if the man himself has supplied a clue. In this case, that happens to be so.

The surviving fragments of *Jubilate Agno*¹ are in many places a workshop for the *Song to David*. One such place is Fragment C, lines 18 to 33. It begins:

For Christ being Alpha and Omega is all the intermediate letters without doubt. For there is a mystery in numbers.

Then follow remarks about each of the numbers from one to nine. They are not very enlightening: two, Smart says, is a bad number because it represents the devil, three is the best of all numbers because it represents infinite perfection, and so on. But already, I think, we have the two keys necessary to open these seven stanzas. First, the letters must be taken not as letters but as the numbers for which they stood in classical Greek. Secondly, *Christ* is all the intermediate letters (or numbers) between alpha and omega; that is to say, the letters or numbers are not symbols of the attributes of the Deity (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.,) but aspects or appearances of Christ, the Word made Flesh.

The first clue—that the letters are numbers—is strengthened by two further places in *Jubilate Agno* where Smart abominates our pagan names for the days of the week and says they should be known by their numbers; only, here, the numbers are not 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, but α - γ - η - θ - ι - σ - ω , that is, 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 18, 24. The second clue is confirmed by a custom quite frequent in Smart, of making the last line of one stanza an indication of what is coming next. The last line which introduces the alpha to omega stanzas (quoted at the beginning of this article) is: "From Christ enthroned

¹ Re-edited by W. H. Bond, Curator of Manuscripts at Harvard University (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).

to man." And the whole poem is, of course, about David foreseeing and foreshadowing the Incarnation.

But to understand how there can be gradations, as it were, of appearance between the divinity of Christ and His humanity, we must understand a little the sort of submerged theology which Smart would have picked up at Cambridge and worked over in his mind. It had seeped down probably from Scotist teachings, through the Cambridge Platonists, and renewed its life in the clear and lofty writing of the great Cambridge and Jacobite divine, William Law.¹ Two sentences from William Law, who had a much finer mind than his Platonist predecessors, will be enough to suggest what I mean.

About the six days of creation Law says that they were a restoration in a lower form of the harmony of heaven that was lost by the fall of Lucifer—"so that the outward condition and frame of visible nature is a plain manifestation of that spiritual world from which it is descended." And about the pre-existence of Christ, Law says that "from that time" (that is, after the fall of Lucifer),

From that time the incarnation of the Son of God began, because he was from that time entered again into human nature, as the seed or beginning of its Salvation, hidden under the veil of the Law, and not made manifest till he was born in the holy and highly blessed Virgin Mary.

Thus in some of the intermediate stanzas between *alpha* and *omega* we shall expect to find some of the foreshadowings of Christ that appear in the Old Testament. We shall find each of them interrelated with some particular number as a symbol and with some particular "day" of the week of creation. There may also be reflections back to some higher event in Heaven and reflections onward to some fulfilment of the image by Christ.

The *alpha* stanza, as has been said, presents no difficulty. On the first day God said, "Let there be light." The bursting forth of the original created light is the image of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, the flashing-forth of the Word, *Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine*. This original light, both spiritual

¹ So far as I know there is only internal evidence to connect Smart with Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, and with William Law. The evidence is given by Mr. W. F. Stead in the first edition of *Jubilate Agno*, which appeared as *Rejoice in the Lamb* (Cape, 1939).

and physical, is "the light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world," spoken of by St. John in his first chapter, whence most of Smart's imagery in this stanza is derived. The opening of St. John's gospel has always been taken by Christians as complementing the opening of the book of *Genesis*.

The *gamma* stanza is much more intricate. *Gamma* is three. Three is the symbol of spiritual perfection in the image of the Blessed Trinity. Angels are the most perfect created images of the Trinity (human souls are less perfect images). This "day" is assigned to the creation of the angels—though in fact there is nothing about angels in this verse of *Genesis*. In *Genesis* on this day the upper heaven was created by the separation of waters. But the angels being denizens of the upper heaven, their creation is traditionally assigned to this day. These ideas are all present in the first two lines of the *gamma* stanza; "the glorious arch" (*arc-en-ciel*) like a rainbow suggests the separation of sky from water. But there is a great deal more than that. The third line, "And is with sapphires paved," comes from the 24th chapter of *Exodus*, verse 10:

And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

All these last chapters of *Exodus*, from the 24th on, relate God's instructions to Moses: to build the Ark of the Covenant where He would show His presence in the form of a cloud, and to establish Aaron in the office of high priest.

The transition in Smart's mind from angel to high priest can be seen working along three lines. The "glorious arch" suggests the rainbow which signed God's covenant with Noah, and that in turn suggests God's covenant with Abraham and the high priest Melchisedek, and so to the Ark of the Covenant and Aaron in *Exodus*. Then the description of "the body of heaven" in *Exodus* 24 leads on to the further imagery of "the painted folds" of the veil of the tabernacle in *Exodus* 26. Finally there is a direct link between angels and priests; both were substitutes for, and images of, Christ the true High Priest of creation. In Smart's angelology, which was substantially orthodox, angels had the office of protecting men, both individually and in groups, and of offering their prayers in heaven. Cardinal (St. Robert)

Bellarmino was echoing common traditional belief when he wrote:

And so in every kingdom there two kings, one visible, a man, and one invisible, namely an angel; and in the Catholic Church universal there are two high priests appointed under Christ the Lord, one visible, a man, and one invisible, an angel, whom we believe to be the archangel Michael: for as of old he was venerated as protector of the synagogue of the Jews, so now of the Christian Church.

The authority for angels offering prayers like priests is St. John in *Revelation*: "And another angel came and stood at the altar having a golden censer . . . and the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (viii, 3-5). From the idea of the censer comes, I think, Smart's beautiful fourth line: "Thence the fleet clouds are sent adrift." The "crimson veil" is used again by Smart in his hymn on *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, and there it connotes the communion service. In the Roman Mass, after the consecration, the priest begs "that these things may be carried up by the hands of Thy holy Angel to Thy altar on high beneath the eyes of Thy divine majesty," so that we who communicate at this earthly altar may be filled with all heavenly graces and blessings.¹

All these types, images and shadows from the Old Law are gathered together in the great *Epistle to the Hebrews* to show that Christ is the true High Priest, always interceding for us, the same yesterday and to-day and forever. This is the thought that gives unity to Smart's imagery of the angelic altar. *Gamma* is a very finely-wrought stanza.

The numbers for the next three days and stanzas are *eta*, *theta* and *iota*, that is, seven, eight and nine. The creations assigned in *Genesis* to these days are: trees and plants for seven, sun and moon for eight, birds and fishes for nine. Connections between these creatures and their numbers could be completely fantastic and useless unless we stick to two conditions, first that Smart himself must make the connection—say what the number stands for—and, secondly, the unifying theme of the stanza must be

¹ Smart clung to all those beliefs of the Church of England which are Catholic rather than Protestant. His own attitude to Rome after his marriage (his wife was a devout Roman Catholic) was a violent mixture of repulsion and attraction which may have played a part in his mental breakdown.

some foreshadowing of Christ before His actual nativity. In the passage already quoted of *Jubilate Agno* he does not tell us exactly what seven and eight stand for; he just says they are both very good because each consists of two perfect numbers. But from the wording of the *eta* and *theta* stanzas it is fairly clear what significations he accepted.

Seven, three upon four, signifies "perfect growth": three for perfection of soul, four for bodily perfection, and seven is the union of the two. In medieval art it is generally depicted as a triangle on a square, or a conical turret on four walls. But Smart's image is an ambivalent one, perfectly suited to his purpose, for it could be either a Tree or a Pillar, the tree of paradise or the pillar of wisdom. The immortal flowers and branches of spiritual perfection in the first half of the stanza, and the "goodly base" of bodily perfection in the second, both could belong to a tree or to a pillar. One thinks of the *Rites of Durham* (a book which Smart probably knew from boyhood) describing the old Cathedral: "From pillar to pillar was set up a border very artificially wrought in stone with marvellous fine colours, very curiously and excellently finely gilt with branches and flowers, the more that a man did look at it the more desires he had, and the greater his affection to behold it." And the trowel, spade and loom of the goodly base are well-known symbols in medieval architecture and art.¹ The picture of Christ which unifies the stanza is that created form, whatever it was, which the Son of God took when he walked with Adam "in the garden in the cool of the day" (*Genesis* iii, 8). You could call it "the Paradisal Christ" or Christ in Nature"—or even, "Christ the Gardener."

Here a difficulty may occur. How can one think of Paradise complete with spiritual perfection on the third day, before the creation of man which is on the sixth day? The traditional explanation—which would also explain why the sun comes after the vegetation instead of before it—is that the six days' work does not constitute a narrative (creation may well have been an instantaneous affair); it is an arrangement by the sacred writer into two triads, one reflecting the other. The first triad is (1) the original light bringing order out of chaos, (2) the upper heaven

¹ It has been suggested that the seven Greek letters have their explanation in high Masonic ritual. But I have been assured on very good authority that this is not so.

of the angels separated from the waters, (3) the earthly paradise. The second triad, of the fourth, fifth and sixth days, is: (1) the lesser lights of sun, moon, etc., (2) the sky and sea for birds and fishes, (3) the earth again, man among the beasts, but after the loss of paradise and before its better restoration which begins on the seventh day. (The other explanation why the sun comes after the vegetation is that the sacred writer was visually inspired to describe things as they would have appeared to a human eye: vegetation growing up within a thick covering of vapour through which the sun was not yet able to pierce, though it was actually there before. But I think Smart would have held the more traditional theory.)

In the *theta* stanza the connection between the number (eight) and the creations (sun and moon) would, once more, seem quite arbitrary if it were not Smart himself who made it. Eight signifies marriage. But what has marriage to do with sun and moon? The answer is that Smart had very definite, if peculiar, ideas on the subject.

For the Sun's at work to make me a garment and the Moon's at work for my wife . . .

For the WEDDING GARMENTS of all men are prepared in the SUN against the day of their acceptance.

For the wedding garments of all women are prepared in the MOON against their purification . . .

For the SUN is an intelligence and an angel of the human form.

For the MOON is an intelligence and an angel in shape like a woman.

For they are together in the spirit every night like man and wife.

What was going on *inside* Smart's mind when he wrote these lines in *Jubilate Agno* is not at all clear, but the meaning, seen from the outside, is quite clearly transferred to *theta*, only much more compressed and objective. The stanza coalesces to form that picture of the Messiah which is present throughout the psalms and canticles and prophets: Christ the Bridegroom. The Bride is Israel, the chosen people of the Old Testament, whose mission is handed over in the New Testament to the universal church and the whole human race. The relation of marriage to the "great mystery" of Christ and His church is laid down by St. Paul in the fifth chapter to the Ephesians, verses 22-33.

So far we have been following the clue that "Christ is all the

intermediate letters (numbers) between *alpha* and *omega*," and it has led us fairly successfully from *alpha* to *theta*. But now with *iota* and *sigma* we have to pass through some very rough country before reaching home in *omega*. In fact, the stanzas would present an impenetrable tunnel were there not a shaft of clear daylight at either end; I mean, in the first line of *iota* and the last of *sigma*.

Nine signifies harmony. This is Smart's own signification: "For Nine is a very good number and harmonious"; and so it appears in the first line of his stanza: "*Iota's* tuned to choral hymns . . ." This is clear enough to show we are on the right track; but after that Smart goes underground. The sequence in his mind of "birds—harmony—choirs of angels—nine"—is fairly clear from a passage in *Jubilate Agno*. But what about the fish? We must do our best. Here is the passage:

Let Cherub rejoice with Cherub who is a bird and a blessed Angel.
For I bless God for every feather from the wren in the sedge to the
CHERUBS & their MATES.

Immediately after that comes a space and then a list of the twelve apostles and other friends of Our Lord, each associated with a variety of fish "Let Peter rejoice with the MOON FISH . . . etc." Then follows a list of Our Lord's ancestors, each again associated with a fish. In between the apostles and the ancestors comes this:

Let Mary rejoice with the Maid—blessed be the name of the
immaculate CONCEPTION

—by which he meant the conceiving of Our Lord by Mary while remaining a maiden, a doctrine which, along with the virgin birth, he held most devoutly. Mixed up with all this passage is a great deal of the private fantasies and obsessions with which Smart was struggling at the time—and which are no concern of this article; but enough of the objective element seems to have survived to form the *iota* stanza. "Nine" signifies virginity as well as harmony; the coupling of birds and fishes symbolises the reconciliation of heights with depths which the Church hymns in the antiphon of Our Lady, playing on the words "virga—virgo," as Smart plays on the word "maid":

Virga Jesse floruit. Virgo Deum et hominem genuit, pacem Deus reddidit, in se reconcilians ima summis,

In this way *iota* could be the sign for the birds and fishes, and at the same time signify the descent of the Son of God into the womb of the Blessed Virgin. Admittedly the analogy is tortuous and far-fetched, but it is not so tortuous or far-fetched as some of the traditionally accepted analogies, for example those in the second window of King's College Chapel, taken from the medieval book, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*.

It may be that the second half of the stanza, "And foot and chapitre and niche . . .," with its return to the architectural *motif*, to the pillars and windows of some great church, could supply a pictorial confirmation of the analogy. It is a coincidence, but probably no more than a coincidence, that when Robert Browning compared Smart's *Song to David* with a great church, he picked out two of the most striking features of Durham Cathedral where Smart was brought up. The first of these is the Chapel of the Nine Windows which has a great rose window over the centre. The other is the stone screen between the present altar and the old shrine; it has five towering pinnacles, each with three tiers of niches for statues. But the only "chapitre" relevant to *iota* seems to be the clustered capitals of the choir; on these is carved an extraordinary intertwining of winged and scaly creatures which might illustrate the biological connection between birds and fish. But it does not help to explain how *iota* could signify the descent of Christ into the womb of the Virgin.

The best confirmation of this is that it fits in time and sequence with the next appearance of Christ, in the *sigma* stanza, namely His actual appearance as a material man on earth. The last line, "For ocular belief," leaves us fortunately in no doubt about this. The fourth and fifth lines tell us that man in general bears the likeness of God in his form and features, but the sixth line tells us that only one man in particular compelled others to believe in God by simply looking at Him. The obvious reference is to St. John i. 18: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." So far, in "the intermediate letters between *alpha* and *omega*," we have had only theophanies or "the seed and beginning of salvation, hidden under the veil of the Law"; *gamma* was the angelic high priest, *eta* was the Christ of Paradise, *theta* was the Bridegroom, and finally *iota* was Christ in the womb. But *sigma* signifies Christ the true man, either in His

actual nativity when His birth among the beasts of the stall was a sign to the shepherds, or perhaps at His baptism when the voice from heaven proclaimed His divinity and He then went into the wilderness "and was with the beasts."

It is a good thing that the second half of the stanza is so clear because *sigma* itself (eighteen) does not signify at all. I do not see what "eighteen" can have to do with Man among the beasts, indeed I do not think the numerologists assign any meaning at all to eighteen. One would say that Smart had changed from the number to the letter in this case, if it were possible to find any meaning in the word *sigma*. Has it anything to do with a seal or impression, which is a key-word in (line 5 of) the stanza? I do not think so. Has it anything to do with *sigé*, silence, which was the name given by the Gnostics to the last stage of the descent of the Divine Word into matter? A sort of pedigree of the descent of Christ from heaven was known to the early Christians, but it was later taken over by the Gnostics; *Sigé* may have come from the text of *Wisdom* (xviii. 14-15) which is used liturgically for the Nativity:

For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, thine Almighty Word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne . . .

But already the main condition of this article is in danger of being violated: that it is useless to speculate along lines where no clue has been provided by the poet himself.

With *omega* we return to reasonable certainty. To Smart, *omega* both as a letter and as a number meant "consummation." As a letter, because it is the last. As a number, for the reason given in *Jubilate Agno*:

For the Four and Twenty Elders of the Revelation are Four and Twenty Eternities. For their Four and Twenty Crowns are their respective consummations.

Omega is the day of rest not only for the Creator but for the Redeemer ("My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." John v. 17). On Holy Saturday Christ "descended into hell" and "closed the infernal draught." Thence follows the inevitable roll of triumph: "The third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Thus *omega* returns to *alpha* in a circle. The

sequence "From Christ enthroned to man" goes back to Christ enthroned, but this time bearing with Him human nature made immortal.

This ends the explanation of the seven pillars in *A Song to David*. It is bound strictly by clues taken from Smart himself. It shows in all the seven cases some connection in his mind between the day of creation and some aspect or appearance of the Redeemer. In every case except one (*sigma*) it shows how the connection could be symbolised by the Greek letter or number in question. But that is not to deny that there may have been many more ideas at work in Smart's mind than have been here detected.

It is fair to ask why it should be necessary to use four thousand words of prose to explain about forty lines of Smart's verse—especially when the explanation is based on a work which he wrote when in confinement for lunacy. The answer is that *Jubilate Agno* is increasingly being recognised as predominantly sane—it is indeed a victorious struggle to maintain sanity—while the *Song to David* is, as Mr. Robert Brittain says, "a triumph of the artistic intellect under perfect control."

It is indeed the most amazing poem, probably unique in the English language. So many sequences of thought are so carefully interwoven, and yet the whole thing comes with the verve and spontaneity of a trumpet call. You can enjoy it without understanding it properly. But if you understand it better, you can enjoy it still more.

NOTE. In later Greek enumeration, the first nine letters of the alphabet stood for digits, the second nine for tens, the third nine (three letters being added to the 24 to make 27) for hundreds. But Smart, who took *omega* as twenty-four, evidently followed the older method used in the numeration of Homer's Books. It is possible that more about his theory of numbers could be found in Iamblichus's *Life of Pythagoras* which he is known to have taken out from the Pembroke College library when he was at Cambridge.

ANAGNI AND ST. THOMAS BECKET

By

J. BLENKINSOPP

ABOUT FORTY MILES from Rome, in the heart of the Papal Campagna, stands the city of Anagni. The occasional English visitor may remember that the English Pope Hadrian IV held court within its walls and rode out through the now ruined gateway to watch the hunt. Few to-day are likely to associate it with St. Thomas of Canterbury; but there is a district near by, round Carpineto Romano, which is called after him, and his canonisation took place at Segni, a mile or two away. And Anagni itself has kept his memory alive in a way perhaps unique in the whole of Europe.

The massive twelfth-century cathedral of Anagni stands on a spur of rock, on what had been the site of the holy place of the Hernici before they were absorbed by the neighbouring tribe on the Tiber. Under the cathedral is a crypt, in one dark, cave-like corner of which is the Oratory of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Entering this chapel is like going out of the fierce sunlight into the spelaeon darkness of San Vitale at Ravenna; one is half-blinded by the contrast in light. At Ravenna, one can gradually make out the smouldering gold of the apse mosaics; and here, in the narthex of the chapel, the figure of Christ, just visible through the damp on the walls, is seen raising His hand in the Greek blessing. On both sides of the Christ is the figure of the beardless John the Evangelist holding a scroll of his Prologue, and nearby is a deposition from the Cross. The absidal fresco is now largely ruined, but a figure of a bishop on the left of Christ is indicated as S. THOMAS (AR)CHIEPS. On the left wall of the sanctuary is an action-scene which is believed to represent the murder in the cathedral. Here and there the point of a spear or sword is visible on the perished surface; and the fresco gives an

impressionistic idea of the press and intensity of the martyr's last moments.

Thomas Becket was murdered on the evening of 27 December 1170; by the spring of the following year thousands were coming in pilgrimage to Canterbury. In 1173 he was canonised by Alexander III, the friend who had written to him so solicitously during his time of trouble, and it was probably about this time that the Pope, who was a frequent visitor at Anagni, consecrated the oratory to the new saint. Interest and devotion were aroused throughout the Christian world. The Pope re-dedicated the church of the English hospice in Rome to Thomas, and many different countries followed his lead in consecrating churches and chapels to the martyr. A cascade of biographies, poems and songs such as the Icelandic *Saga of Thomas Erkebyskups*, appeared very soon after his death, showing how quickly his fame spread and how deeply the circumstances of his death moved the imagination of his contemporaries. A story was current, soon after his death, that Thomas had visited Anagni, but it seems certain that he never in fact left France during his seven years' exile. The tale was probably a pious fiction meant to enhance the prestige of the place.

The oratory itself is long and narrow, with low podia running down the length of the sides, and a low wall dividing the "nave" from the sanctuary. The altar is now only an irregular mass of masonry, though the place for the altar-stone can still be seen. This tunnel-like shape, the raised podia and rough altar are all characteristic of a mithraeum. Elements of the Mithra cult appear in the practices of some medieval dualist heretics and Dr. Margaret Murray has propounded the interesting theory that the murder of the archbishop was a blood-sacrifice, an example of the extremely ancient, pre-Christian rite of the annual slaughter of the god-king, or his ritual substitute.

The idea that the oratory had ever been a mithraeum has been dismissed by Canon Professor Giacinto Centra, who lives at Anagni and is an authority on its history, on the grounds that no regular troops, and especially no Asiatic troops, had ever been billeted at Anagni. The theory is, however, taken up by Hugh Ross Williamson in *The Arrow and the Sword*, in which he points out that in one of the first representations of the martyrdom, an early illumination,¹ Thomas is depicted as wearing the

¹ Harley MS., 5102.

Phrygian cap, the *pileus* of Mithra.¹ Mr. Ross Williamson adds that no satisfactory explanation has been given of why this cap should have been worn, and why, in the later iconography of the saint, the cap should have been changed to a mitre. It is true that this illustration shows a cap falling from the Archbishop's head. But surely this is the *pileus* or *camelaucum* often worn by bishops when not officiating, which was practically indistinguishable at this period from the *phrygium*. He was later depicted in a mitre both because the story gained ground that he was martyred saying Mass, and for purposes of identification—the mitre being the mark of the bishop in medieval iconography. However, perhaps further evidence for the Catharist theory can be collected from an examination of the frescoes both in the oratory and in Anagni Cathedral itself. The chapel ceiling is covered with what appears at first sight to be a maze of esoteric and apocalyptic scenes, worked in natural vegetable pigments. They still retain something of the almost hallucinatory directness which they must have conveyed six centuries ago. A closer scrutiny reveals, however, not a maze but a planned sequence. The first series begins a little left of centre with the creation of Light and Darkness, represented by a white and black man. The dove soars over the cosmic ocean in which are visible some strange fish and what is presumably the monster of Chaos. The creation of Man and Woman is depicted next, then the Fall and the Eviction from the Garden. The series continues with an angel standing guard as Adam and Eve fall back dismayed before a huge red ball of fire²; then follows Cain's murder of Abel, with the soul of the dead Abel leaving his body in the form of a diminutive red homunculus with outstretched hands. The last square is too badly deteriorated to be recognisable.

The second series of the tableau follows in chiastic order with Abram and Melchisedek offering the cup and bread, Abram entertaining the angels at Mamre, and the divine command to sacrifice Isaac.³ In this last scene, the servants and the donkey loaded with a pannier remain at the foot of the mountain while

¹ The same picture is reproduced in Robert Speaight's *Life of Thomas of Canterbury*, opposite p. 198.

² This is at least as scriptural as the usual representation of an angel with wings holding a sword, for which Genesis 3, 24 gives no warrant!

³ We have here then the three Old Testament sacrifices mentioned in *Supra Quae*, the prayer said at Mass shortly after the Consecration.

at the top, a flying angel intervenes at the last moment, and the ram which is to act as ritual substitute stands patiently by. On the left the series begins with the Annunciation, but is broken off to make way for a painting of Scholastica and seven Benedictine saints. It is strange that no one who has written about these designs¹ has thought it necessary to explain this interruption. Signor Sibilis, who himself carried out the delicate work of cleaning the paintings, remarks how much better preserved and brighter are these pictures of the saints than the others which represent sacred history. This would suggest that the space was originally covered by a *Vita Christi* down to the Passion, and was later used for these portraits, perhaps commissioned by the Benedictine Bishop Peter who built the cathedral. If the frescoes were originally completed in this way there must have been three series, culminating in the sacrifice and death of Abel, the sacrifice by ritual substitute of Isaac and the sacrifice and death of Christ. The chapel itself is dedicated to the martyr Thomas whose death and glory are recorded in the sanctuary. All this work was done within seventy years of Thomas's death.

Down in the crypt of Anagni cathedral, among the apocalyptic horsemen and pythagorean symbols are several portraits of Thomas. One figure, wrongly called St. Magnus, the martyr-founder of the cathedral, is almost certainly Thomas as it is wearing both the pallium and the red vestment of the martyr liturgy. On several occasions St. John the Evangelist is depicted with the archbishop, and this has been regarded as significant because St. John was one of the "patron-saints" of the dualist heretics. However, there may well have been a special devotion to St. John in Anagni, as there was to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The latter was canonised in 1173, the year after Thomas, and is depicted with the English saint in the chapel of the Gaetani in Anagni cathedral, which was built by the Gaetani Pope, Boniface VIII.

Further historical evidence has been brought forward to support the link between the dualist heresy and St. Thomas. Hugh Ross Williamson cites the occasion of the last meeting between Thomas and the king at Amboise before the archbishop's

¹ In Italian there is the excellent *Guida* of Sibilis, but nothing that I know of in English. Tancred Borenius merely states in *St. Thomas Becket in Art* (Methuen, 1932) that he has read of a fresco in the crypt of Anagni Cathedral (p. 55, note 1).

return to England and his death. Thomas, desperately anxious for an unequivocal sign of Henry's goodwill, arranged to hear Mass with him, intending that they should publicly exchange the Kiss of Peace. Henry, however, heard of the plan and ordered the celebrant to say a Requiem Mass which omits the ritual of the Kiss of Peace. But after the last Gospel had been read, Thomas took the Missal, kissed it and handed it to Henry, asking at the same time for the Pax. According to Hugh Ross Williamson, this was a Catharist ritual, which consisted in the recital of the Prologue of St. John and the Kiss: an ingenious but not completely satisfactory suggestion. The Kiss of Peace, for the Cathari, was only one part of a long initiation rite, the Consolamentum; a ceremony which would have been inappropriate on this occasion.

Again, those who favour the Catharist theory have pointed out interesting discrepancies between the representations of the death of Thomas and historical fact. In the Anagni *tesoro* there is a magnificent dalmatic decorated with scenes from the life of St. John the Evangelist, Thomas and St. Edmund, king and martyr. The central design is of peculiar interest because in it Thomas is seen kneeling in front of the altar, evidently celebrating Mass, while two knights (not the four of history) prepare to attack him. The fact that the vestment is almost certainly of English origin makes this all the more remarkable. There are only two knights carved upon the font in the church of Lyngsjö in Sweden which dates from twenty years after the martyrdom, and again two on the Chartres north door which dates from about 1250. Also in the *tesoro* is an enamelled casket of delicate Limoges work dating from the thirteenth century. Here again the martyrdom is depicted; the archbishop is celebrating Mass—one can see the chalice standing on a three-legged support—two soldiers are attacking him and one is cutting off his head.

These variations on what are known to be the facts—the number of knights, the fact that Thomas is saying Mass, the decapitation—would be explained by the "Myth and Ritual" theory as a deliberate attempt to conceal the real nature of the deed that took place on that dark winter night in 1170. This explanation is in some ways an attractive one, but depends on a rather selective treatment of evidence. It does not give a good explanation of the strong personal enmities against the archbishop, nor of the furore caused by his refusal to acquit the

excommunicated bishops. Nor does it give an adequate explanation of what he said during the last few minutes of his life. Before the swords cut him down he not only identified himself as *Sacerdos Dei*, the priest of God (according to the "Myth and Ritual" view this would mean "the priest of *my* god") but declared that he was dying for Christ and the Church, and recited the *Confiteor*. The apparent falsifications of his friend John of Salisbury, who was present, can be quite naturally explained by the fact that he ran away before the butchery began and hid behind a pillar. By this time the cathedral must have been quite dark. He cannot therefore be considered an eye-witness in the true sense of the word.

In addition to this, Thomas, if he was a crypto-Cathar, kept his secret extraordinarily well. The king would have welcomed any opportunity of discrediting Thomas. In the one recorded case of the heresy's appearance in England at about this time, Henry acted with exemplary thoroughness—not to say savagery. He had its followers flogged, branded and declared outlaw. Thomas's secret must have been completely unsuspected, too, by the ordinary people with whom the sect was unpopular, and who were quite capable of lynching suspected heretics.

We are left then, with nothing more than a tantalising hypothesis. In the so-called oratory itself we have seen some of the clues: a dark mithraeum, or mithraeum-like tunnel, the frescoes of the initial cosmic act with its figures of Light and Darkness, and the theme of blood-sacrifice. There are numerous representations of one of the "patron-saints" of the Brotherhood, St. John, holding the scroll inscribed with his Prologue which was the formula in the *Consolamentum*—the supreme moment in the life of the initiate. Outside the chapel in the crypt all this is given its cosmic context. In the central apse the mystic Lamb, a familiar figure in dualist liturgies, looks down; around it are the four Animals (or "Living Creatures"), the four knights of the Apocalypse, the four cherubim standing on the mysterious chariot.¹ It would, though, be interesting to know why the story of the Apocalypse stops here at Chapter xiv, which Mr. Ross Williamson claims had special significance for Manichee and Cathar.

There are other signs and symbols at Anagni, such as figures

¹ Ezekiel, Ch. 1. Mr. Ross Williamson points out that the number four was a hallmark of the dualist heretics.

entwined with serpents, Elias and the Raven, Elias and the Fiery Chariot and the signs of the zodiac, which may similarly be of Cathar or Manichee inspiration. Among them is a remarkable diagram called *compositio mundi*, which seems to be based on the pythagorean number philosophy of Plato's *Timaeus*. To help in the interpretation of this diagram, I would like to add a scholium to the section on medieval numbers in Hugh Ross Williamson's book. Corresponding to the three-dimensional world, there must be three-dimensional numbers, since number and reality are convertible terms. These numbers are cubes. Now, matter is composed of four elements; fire and earth are the extremes, air and water the intermediaries. Fire is the divine and indestructible element, the world-soul of the Stoics, the *anima mundi* and the *anima humana*. The number corresponding to fire is three, its cosmic number is therefore three to the third power, or twenty-seven. That of earth is two, cosmic number eight. In perfect intermediary proportion are the numbers of water and air, twelve and eighteen respectively. Alongside this chart is the equally unusual figure of Man as the Microcosmos, a naked figure surrounded by concentric circles relating him to the macrocosmic forces which he attempts to control, never wholly successfully.

What does all this accumulated evidence amount to? Obviously it proves nothing; nothing certain, at least. Perhaps there is a thesis in it for someone willing to sift the seven big volumes of the Rolls Series to see whether at any time Thomas came under Cathar influences, particularly at the moment when he saw that his death was essential to the well-being of the Church. Beyond this we cannot go because there is no shred of direct evidence that Thomas was in any way associated with dualist heresy. His death was after the pattern of Christ's death, which was, I think, what the oratory artist wanted to show. He died for the sake of the Church, but not the church of the Cathars. The martyrdom was in a wider spiritual context than that and its effects were felt throughout Christendom. Its fascination seems to have something to do with the fact that at a certain point Thomas saw that there was no salvation in politics, ecclesiastical or otherwise. His desire for sacrifice and death came into being at that moment, and matured during his exile in France. Whether or not influences of the kind I have been discussing encouraged Thomas to make the final decision, his martyrdom stimulated an upsurge of

artistic creation all over Europe: in the popular passion-liturgy at Canterbury, where the cathedral lay desecrated for a year, in the Icelandic saga, and, I believe, on the walls and ceiling of the chapel at Anagni.

JUSTICE FOR UMBRIA

On a Walk in Central Italy

By

ADRIAN HASTINGS

BEFORE SETTING OUT from Rome to explore the lands to the north it is as well to choose one's period. The mood for the Quattrocento is not the same as that for Roman ruins or, even less, for a past more mysterious still. All this land was Etruria before it was ever Rome, and the cities on the hills, Perugia, Orvieto, Tuscania, were cities already in Etruscan days. Though they have changed, their graveyards and their great walls remain. But it is not good to mix these things, and while devoting a week in 1958 to exploring the borderlands of Umbria, Latium and Tuscany I must confess that we neglected the Etruscans. To the next centuries too we gave little thought, except to delight in the sixth-century round church of S. Angelo at Perugia, a gem of its kind, and the rough eighth-century crypt of the Abbazia San Salvatore. But it is anyway from about 1200 that all this country comes alive, with papal towns and Franciscan friaries and little gems of early Renaissance building.

Orvieto was to be our starting point, treasure house of the Signorellis which influenced Michelangelo; a papal city. These papal towns of the thirteenth century which stand about Rome, Orvieto and Viterbo, Rieti and Anagni, have a peculiar fascination. Their spacious palace halls and finely-built cathedrals help us to put Avignon into perspective. The popes did not leave Rome for Avignon, they left these little hill towns, walled and towered,

and it has often seemed to me that Castel Gandolfo in the summer months must recall quite well that papal atmosphere of the thirteenth century: the great palace out of proportion to the habitations around it, the throng of foreigners hurrying up the steep town lanes to see the *servus servorum Dei* dwelling outside his diocese, surrounded by clergy and guards.

We left Orvieto in the afternoon, crossing the hills to the south-west, and it had become quite dark before we plodded down the road into Bolsena, where occurred the miracle which gave Orvieto its corporal and the Church the office of Corpus Christi. Bolsena has fish, some charming bits of Della Robbia and a pleasant sandy lake. The valley to the north up which the road runs towards Siena was dry and bare, Monte Amiata to the west, and, always eyeing one from its high perch in the middle of the valley, the great grim fortress of Radicofani. Then to Pienza. This is lovely, quite lovely, and so little known. A miniature town, a sort of toy, built in one flash of excitement in the mid-fifteenth century by Pius II, who was born here, and his architect Rossellino. In a few years up went a cathedral, a delightful palace for the pope's family, the Piccolomini, and a few other palaces to keep them company. Then Pius died, and Pienza, which he had called after himself, has never changed since.

In view, on another hill a few miles to the east is Montepulciano, better known, bigger, with more to see but less *carino*. St. Robert Bellarmine came from here and two popes, not only one like Pienza. In the cathedral sacristy they have a sort of town family tree with one branch for popes, another for cardinals, a third for monsignori and so on. I thought the numerous blanks left for future insertion on the papal branch over-optimistic. On the hillside outside the town is one of those "models" for St. Peter's, Sangallo's S. Biagio, another being the church of Our Lady of Consolation at Todi; for the perfection of Renaissance architecture these are hard to beat. At Montepulciano too, there is in the cathedral behind the main altar the loveliest of altar pieces; it is painted by Taddeo di Bartolo; there is also a charming little Duccio. It is always nice in Italy coming on unexpected pictures, like Mrs. Perkins' collection at Assisi or the art gallery in a locked-up church at Monte Falco. Perhaps the best surprise of all was to walk into the unpretentious episcopal museum at

Cortona and find there Fra Angelico's most exquisite Annunciation. Otherwise Cortona has not much to show; even Brother Elias's great church being of little interest except that its parishioners seem all to be clothed in pyjamas. A Franciscan showed where Elias is buried behind the high altar, and one of the pyjama people accompanied us. "We should dig him up," she said, but the Franciscan shook his head. "Too deep, too deep," he replied, "and he will only be dust anyway." "Still, we should try," she continued; the prospect of an unsuspected cult was dazzling: "We could put him in a wax case under a side altar." "But he's not a saint," I interjected. "Then it's useless," she sadly agreed.

The cult of the saints and of Our Lady remain the standby of popular religion. Tuesday for St. Anthony, Wednesday for St. Joseph, Friday for the *Madonna Addolorata*. But the old *festas* have now a modern rival. The feasts of the Madonna continue to be kept but beside them there is a new celebration: the *festa de l'Unita*. With it Communism has entered into the Italian's ritual year. In a recent missionary gathering there was a discussion about whether the Byzantine or the Roman rite was more fitted for the Arab temperament. It was felt that the simplicity and dignity of the Roman rite would be more adapted to anyone formed by the stark simplicity of the Moslem tradition. Remembering this discussion I could not help thinking how unadapted to the Italian countryman is the Roman rite. Its low Mass is well suited to the quieter temperament of the northern races, but all the characteristic virtues of Roman liturgy—moderation, precision of expression, economy of words—are strikingly absent from modern Italian, ecclesiastical Italian above all. It is not surprising that the *festa* with its blaze of lights, its colourful statues and emotional hymns, appeals more than the austerity of the western liturgy. Perhaps Italians would do better if they took up the Byzantine rite.

Below Cortona is Lago Trasimeno, the greatest lake in Italy and the pride of Umbria. Alas, it is also at present one of Umbria's chief headaches because the water will keep ebbing away. For twenty years this has been going on and the shore recedes and the fishing gets more difficult and the Lido at Passignano is sadly pointless. Causes and cures are less obvious than the fact of recession. "It doesn't rain enough nowadays," say the local inhabitants, or "It's all the landlords' fault really." Parliament

has recently voted money to investigate the possibility of diverting rivers to Trasimeno which at present run less usefully to the sea. This is at least a governmental gesture of sympathy, a way of showing that central Italy has not been entirely forgotten.

Yet at least that September Trasimeno did not present for Umbria either the only or the chief problem. No, indeed. Umbria herself was in danger as seldom before and Umbrians were being urged to stand together, put heart into their allies, and not yield an inch to the enemy who turned out to be some unnamed but very wicked bureaucrats in Rome. The *casus belli*? The *Autostrada del sole*, a glorious new motor road, is linking Italy together north and south but—let the dreadful truth be known—that road does not pass through Perugia and the centre of Umbria but skirts its western frontiers. Already in the last century, one could read in the streets of Perugia, a grave injustice was done to Umbria when the railway was built from Florence to Rome and took the direct route, passing to the west, not the east, of Trasimeno. Is such a flagrant injustice to be repeated in this century? Is Umbria to be forced to continue in her ancient isolation? "Umbria cannot and will not die" read the posters. Only a little courage is needed: allies rally on every side—Venice, Rieti, Ravenna. Even the countries of the Middle East, the posters somewhat unexpectedly continued, are firm in their support for Umbria. Yet alas, all was in vain. Why should the centre of Italy always be neglected? The North is rich and that is all right, while the South is poor and so receives government help, but the centre being neither the one nor the other feels itself to be a little forgotten. One does not find much that is new here, once away from the industry of Terni in the south, and all the interest lies in the past, a medieval and Franciscan past in spite of the endless plaques to Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel. The province is pleasant and unchanging, and Perugia with its foreign university and excellently arranged art gallery, its smart clothes and musical festivals, its distinguished archbishop and communist mayor, is a dignified and satisfying provincial capital. Yet life in this part of Italy, whether civil or religious, must seem at times like the waters of Trasimene to be gently ebbing away, the *autostrada* passing far off, the churches nearly as empty as the bathing huts of Passignano.

"We have never had it so good as now," say the older clergy,

and that may well be true, but there is little religious fervour in these parts and the contemplative Orders, which always provide a good index of the spiritual vitality of a community, are almost extinct among men. The Franciscans, despite exquisite retreats like the Carceri and Greccio, are a pastoral rather than a contemplative body. The chief monastic group in central Italy is that of the Bernardines, a branch of the Cistercians unrepresented in England. They have fine old churches but very small communities, except at Casamiri where their numbers are increased by an intake of Ethiopians. The stricter Cistercians, at Tre Fontane and Frattochie, seem to appeal still less to the Italian temperament. A lack of vigorous monasteries is a serious one, and hardly made up, I feel, by such institutions as Assisi's *Cittadella* where, amid pleasant surroundings and liturgical revivalism, Don Giovanni Rossi is creating a sort of Catholic Caux. The whole atmosphere with its heartiness and a certain irritating brashness of presentation, is strikingly similar to that of MRA. Neither the originality nor the sincerity of the *Cittadella's* founder can be questioned, and time alone will show whether his movement with its missions and publications presents a serious force for the renewal of Italian religion, but one may wonder whether it goes anywhere near deep enough. Some will doubtless answer that Italian religion needs no real renewal, it is all there—underneath and only requires the sort of stimulus to be found in the *Cittadella* and the *Mondo Migliore*. Maybe. Umbria cannot and will not die. Maybe after all an *autostrada* will come to Perugia; maybe the rivers will be quickly turned and the waters flow again into Trasimeno. Maybe.

WILD MAN FROM WISCONSIN¹

WHEN the late Senator McCarthy was at the height of his power an astute ex-Communist was responsible for the remark that, had McCarthy not existed, the Party would have been forced to create him. The observation was prescient, its meaning quite clear. The effect of McCarthy's insane anti-Communism would be such as to inhibit eventually a great deal of sane anti-Communist effort. Its outcome would be the strengthening of that group of people known in the United States as the "anti-anti's." McCarthy's brief

¹ Senator Joe McCarthy, by Richard H. Rovere (Methuen 18s).

but violent rampage across the American political stage, his denunciation as directly conspiratorial of something which could be classed accurately as no more than a vague fellow-travelling mentality, produced its own inevitable reaction. Those in America called liberals—the equivalent of the *New Statesman* following in this country—were not merely turned into martyrs by McCarthy's unjust and merciless harrying. They lived on as a group to fight another day, to caricature as McCarthyism any criticism of their ideas, which are often very bad ideas indeed. Paradoxically enough, McCarthy, the would-be killer of Communism in America, has ended by supplying that country's ideological soft centre with its finest defensive bulwark. To be left in peace, they have only to cry "McCarthyism" at any critique, however legitimate, of their activities. And not only in America. It would be ironical, indeed, if history revealed McCarthy as protecting the fellow-travellers of the West to the point where they became the Communist Party's longed-for Trojan horse. As things are to-day, such an outcome is not impossible, especially with Russia's campaign in favour of "peaceful competition" mounting in intensity. "War to the hilt between Communism and Capitalism is inevitable," said David Manuilsky as long ago as 1931. "To-day, of course, we are not strong enough to attack. Our time will come in twenty or thirty years. The bourgeoisie will have to be put to sleep, so we will begin by launching the most spectacular peace movement on record. There will be electrifying overtones and unheard-of concessions. The capitalist countries, stupid and decadent, will rejoice to co-operate in their own destruction. They will leap at another chance to be friends. As soon as their guard is down we shall smash them with our clenched fist . . ." Point to that type of thing as indicating that the Communist theory of strategic withdrawal prompted Mr. Krushchev's recent peace drive and it is not unlikely that you will be classed as a "McCarthyite." Therein, lies one of the great ultimate disservices which Senator Joe McCarthy has done to the Western world.

Typical of the reaction against McCarthy is that of the American liberal author of this able impressionist study of the Senator from Wisconsin. Reading Richard Rovere's pages one would not dream that there was the slightest foundation in fact for any of the charges brought by McCarthy against his victims. Yet such a foundation existed at least in the general sense that, whilst McCarthy was on the rampage and well before, Communist propaganda was penetrating certain sectors of American public life. Without in any way yielding to absurdities like those contained in the recently published *Pentagon Case*,¹ it can be said, quite truly, that, at the time McCarthy began

¹ *Pentagon Case*, by Victor J. Fox (Blandford Press, London, 1959).

his uncouth anti-Communist onslaught, certain spheres of American public life were subject to Communist influence. That should surprise no one who knows anything at all of the Communist mind. But it is a far call from a situation of this sort to the caricature of a conspiracy which McCarthy conjured up for members of American audiences who were callow and cranky enough to listen to him. Rovere and his like are right to condemn McCarthy and his methods. They are quite wrong to suggest, even by implication, that McCarthy's anti-Communism was divorced from any foundation in reality, however far the Senator himself may have stood from any knowledge of its whereabouts. Whatever McCarthy may have known of it—and we suspect that he knew precious little—the substance of Communist penetration existed in the United States in the Senator's time, as it exists now not only in that country but throughout the West. Quiet recognition of that fact is one thing. It is quite another to bring wild accusations of conspiratorial Communist intent against the possessors of what the Americans would describe as a liberal mentality.

The dominance of this liberal mentality during the Rooseveltian era produced its reaction in the shape of the wild man from Wisconsin. The wild man has gone, but the mentality remains. So long as it does, the West is in peril from the central error of its thinking, which is to divorce freedom from truth and accord it the status of an absolute end. Thereby, the way is paved for the entry of falsehood, the creation of confusion and the eventual destruction at Communist hands of freedom itself. To recognise this danger is not McCarthyism. Neither does it imply an advocacy of dictatorship as a means to its removal: that would produce, in all probability, a sickness far worse than the disease it is meant to cure.

There is only one useful conclusion to be drawn from any analysis of the danger presented by the weakness of the liberal mentality when compared with the strength of Communism's contemporary ideological drive. It is that those who possess the truth to-day are under obligation more than ever to devote all they have to its unremitting service. Were they to do so, the West would have nothing to fear from the ruthlessness of Communist endeavour. The latter succeeds only because good men fail to do their duty. We are left with the thought, uncomfortable but true, that the empire of Communist success is largely the measure of Christian deficiency. In the very last analysis, men of good will should blame themselves rather than the liberal mentality for the arrival on the American scene of Senator Joe McCarthy.

PAUL CRANE

REVIEWS

THE PAPACY: MODERN AND RENAISSANCE

Vatican Diplomacy, by R. A. Graham, S.J. (Princeton University Press and Oxford University Press 60s).

Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II. Translated by Florence A. Gragg; edited by Leona D. Gabel (Allen and Unwin 30s).

THE FORMER BOOK, "A Study of Church and State on the International Plane," is regarded by the author as a "hesitant beginning," but begins strikingly by telling us that on the table in Clemenceau's study, preserved as he left it, lay the last book he was reading—"a political history of the Popes." The impenitent old anti-clerical recognised the *Res Catholica*, the "Catholic Fact," which no Government could ignore. On the whole, it is true that in the Greek city-state there was only one authority, though what would have happened if the Athenian government had ordered an initiate to reveal the Eleusinian mysteries? The Roman government wished to suppress "foreign" cults (but fashionable ladies were irrepressibly devout to Isis): even Constantine and following Western emperors were vague about their relationship with the Church, and in the East the emperors, despite the monks, soon enough laid hold upon both sceptres. But when the East became so nervous about Persian threats, and its exarchs at Ravenna mere ghosts, and the Western emperor vanished, the Popes became the sole surviving authority, and Gregory the Great found himself having to look after coinage and weights and measures. The Popes came to be in possession of vast lands of which they were temporal princes, even with fiefs overseas. Charlemagne, once more emperor in 800, became almost Byzantine: his officers were "sacred"; his acts were "divine." Even when the theory of the one Emperor and the one Pope was admitted, confusion was sure to grow worse, since the Pope was *also* a temporal, territorial sovereign. Absolute monarchies became inevitable, and the final schism between civil and canon law. Thenceforward there could be nothing but systems by means of which the Pope could communicate with those who govern, or "manage" States. Since the fragmentation of Europe, and the rapid increase in the number of independent units, the accredited representatives of the Vatican have also become more numerous, enjoying such positions as the civil governments, themselves so various in character, have been driven to allow. Thus there has come to exist an ecclesiastical bureaucracy parallel to or rather interwoven with the worldly one, offering to human weakness just the

same opportunities for ambition, intrigue, expediency, compromise, and even bribery. "Diplomacy" has come to mean a clever, if not an underhand way of getting what you want, or if you cannot do that, making the best of a bad job. Happily, the intransigence of the Church where principle is concerned has triumphed even when it implied the impoverishment of the Holy See and the persecution and even exile of more than one Pontiff.

Fr. Graham with incredible industry not only sets out the intricacies of modern diplomatic missions, but traces their development from the Middle Ages to our own. Paradoxically, though the modern tendency is towards the secularisation of States, more and more States are represented at the Vatican, though neither the U.S.A. nor the U.S.S.R. are so represented. And yet, War II practically forced the U.S.A. to send someone (Mr. Myron Taylor) *somehow* to explain its point of view to the Holy See—everyone else, whose foreign policy mattered, did the same: but how difficult it was to find a *way* of doing so! Doubtless, in this wicked world, these protocols and precedencies and tortuosities are to some degree inevitable; but how grateful they may be who in no way have ever been involved in them! How hard it must be for the Pope himself to get possession of every relevant fact; and for his "Congregations" to obtain and present them to him in true perspective and without bias! How we should pray for him who carries the *immensa pondere claves*!

The *Commentaries* of Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, 1405-1464) had a curious history. The Pope wrote in hours snatched from sleep, but in the third person (save for lapses, common to most of those who try thus to write about themselves), and were copied for him by a German, John Gobel, who signed his copy "G." He then was thought to be the author when it was published in the late sixteenth century: even so, it was much bowdlerised, as parts would seem offensive to ears pious or otherwise. It was Pastor who discovered the original in the Vatican, and the whole has been translated by the authors of this abridgment in the Smith College Studies in History. The abridgment has been made, not for the sake of edification, but because the Pope repeats himself, takes over whole passages from other historians, quotes enormous speeches, and in fact would make his entire work inaccessible to ordinary readers. Excised passages, here replaced, are printed in italics; so too are "transitional" passages in which the abbreviators use only the Pope's own words.

As for his youth, he was to say he hoped the "Aeneas" would be forgotten in the "Pius"; anyhow, he was ordained relatively late. He went from one secretaryship and one diplomatic mission to another, always climbing: he was present at the Council of Basle and sided at first with the anti-Pope Felix V who sent him with others on an

embassy to the Emperor Frederick. But the emperor caused him to receive the laurel wreath proper to poets, and in the end Aeneas transferred his allegiance to the true Pope Eugenius IV whom the Council declared was deposed. He became the right-hand man of the next Pope, Nicholas V and already perceived the danger of a Turkish infiltration into Christian Europe, especially after the disaster of 1453, and was sent on one legation after another through eastern countries. In 1458 Nicholas died, and we now possess in full the startling account of the Conclave during which small groups of Cardinals were reduced to meeting in the least expected retreats to discuss the election. In the end, Aeneas became Pius II. Clearly it would be of no service to outline the external events of his reign, save his determination to launch a crusade against the encroaching Turk, and his calling of a conference in Mantua in view of it. But hardly anyone arrived and the crusade came to nothing: the European and even Italian princes were unable to live on good terms with one another; others alleged insufficiency of funds, or of arms, and that the Turk was invincible; or again that Mantua was the wrong place to meet at—one heard nothing but frogs croaking in the marshes that even the Gonzaga dukes could not drain. We regret the inevitable gaps in this history, especially the part played by Hungary when St. John Capistran at the side of Hunyadi saw the Turks defeated at Belgrade. At first, Pius admired Capistran, but later, refused to canonise him. To make up for his set-back at Mantua Pius received the head of St. Andrew, rescued at Constantinople, with incredible pomp: described in minute detail by the Pope who hailed Andrew, Peter's brother, as uncle of the Roman Church. But the Pope, still wedded to his plan of a crusade, resolved against all advice to lead it in person, but he died at Ancona and the *Commentaries* were never finished. Our first impression is one of the insane jealousies between and within the Italian states, but also between whole nations: Pius, so clear-sighted about the East, detested the French, and despised the Venetians as mere merchants, and, on his side, was easily seen chiefly as a prince and could be told to go back to "his" church, Rome.

The wretched peoples found compensation for blood and taxes in fantastic pageants, secular (marriages or state-entries) or religious (jubilees, canonisations, etc.); they are illusory, creating a vision of power, and the lying sense that something substantial has been witnessed. This Pope, indomitably courageous despite icy weather rendering mountain-paths full of peril and the gout that tormented him, was amazingly sensitive to the colours of fields and flowers and especially to streams and lakes—in fact, he kept turning important conferences with Cardinals into picnics where they sat beneath shady trees, and once, above Tivoli, so pure, says he, was the spring water

that the Cardinals actually preferred it to wine. And he scathingly denounced the "luxury and pride" of "our Curia (which) makes us so hateful to the people that we are not listened to *even when we speak the truth.*" He passionately demands a return to the apostolic virtues of abstinence, purity, eagerness for martyrdom which were what caused the triumph of the faith. But he says all this during an even more impassioned appeal for money to finance a war against the Turks in which at last the princes would join, while he, surrounded by his prelates, would stand on some mountain peak—or stern of a ship—upholding the Blessed Sacrament while others fought below, and ready, himself, for death. Pius II, then, seems to us like a man still waist-deep in the corruption of his age, but able to look out to a half-way horizon, and anxious to lead to that limited extent in the Church's self-reformation. Yet unable to extricate himself wholly from a position that might so easily have been fatal.

C. C. MARTINDALE

ROOT AND FLOWER

Epoch and Artist, by David Jones (Faber and Faber 25s).

THE SHORTEST PIECE in this book is a letter which Mr. Jones wrote to *The Tablet* in 1958 about the disappearance of the *Vexilla Regis* from our liturgy. It is only a page and a half. But it is like the clip which holds together this book of "occasional papers" written and published during the last twenty years. If we can understand Mr. Jones's intense intellectual feeling for the *Vexilla Regis*, we can understand why this book is as much concerned with antiquarian topics of Wales and early Britain as it is with the profound universal question of "Art and Sacrament." The reason is given in a sentence from an earlier book by Mr. Jones: "the works of man unless they are of 'now' and of 'this place' can have no 'for ever.' " But what has that to do with the *Vexilla Regis*? There is another sentence which Mr. Harman Grisewood in a foreword quotes from Mr. Donald Nichol's review of this earlier book: "Europeans cannot now make sense of their own past. Yet that is precisely what David Jones has managed to do in his *Anathemata.*"

Our barbaric ancestors, Celtic or Teutonic, had the inestimable blessing of becoming Christian just before they began to become civilised. Time, history, self-awareness, literature, art, reality, all began for them with the Incarnation. They reached out to Christ with a great longing and tenderness all the more poignant because of the sordid violence that surrounded most of their lives; and when He came to them, He came very gently, not trampling or bruising the

roots and branches of their pagan goodness, so that the new spiritual life within them blossomed naturally into new understanding and new modes of expression; learning and piety went forward inseparably hand-in-hand. "The Word was made Celtic" is how Mr. Jones has put it. And you could say equally, "The Word was made English" or "The Word was made Frankish." The Anglo-Saxon *Dream of the Rood* is one of the most wonderful examples of rich native earth embracing the hard seed of the gospel. There is the same extraordinary tenderness in the earlier Latin Frankish hymn of Fortunatus:

Flecte ramos, arbor alta,
Tensa laxa viscera,
Et rigor lentescat ille
Quem dedit nativitas;
Et superna membra Regis
Tende miti stipite.

Christ made His home irrevocably in the Western mind during those cruel centuries of the making of Europe. We naturally tend to fall back on the past for a moment to steady ourselves in face of a bewildering future; but all the great moments of our history (1660 and so on) will only be collapsible substitutes unless they are backed by that supreme moment when Christ made His home in the Western mind. In this way Fortunatus's hymn serves as a link between the two main constituents of *Epoch and Artist* which are an exploration of the past and a survey of the future.

The exploration is artistic; it is a feeling or groping back to the past through particular names and places, or it is a tracing of dreams like the Arthurian legend which was common at one time to most of the West. It is always an alive exploration; it gives freshness and permanence to some quite disparate topics, such as his review of Eric Gill and of Christopher Smart. In his survey of the future, perhaps his most important question is: what is going to happen if the Church's theology of the Sacraments becomes quite cut off from "sacramentalism" with a small "s"?

The implications of this question—how it touches contemporary life and what can we do about it—are too vast and difficult to be attempted in a passing review. Mr. Jones is not easy reading. The criticism he accepts of himself is true, that he is "a visual artist first and a writer second." That priority was not true of the *Anathemata* where he dealt in sculptured statement, but it is true of these papers where he has to argue and explain. Nevertheless one can always rely, sooner or later, on some plainly-stated insight which makes this collection of the last twenty years equally timely and timeless.

CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The Discovery of God, by Henri de Lubac, S.J., translated by Alexander Dru (Darton, Longman and Todd 18s).

FR. DE LUBAC'S BOOK on man's knowledge of God is in two senses an anthology. It is a series of "thoughts (which) are deliberately fragmentary, and make no claim to replace the classic treatises on the subject." But there is, all the same, a logical sequence in the thoughts, some of which take a few lines and some a few pages; and they progress in chapters according to subject-matter. A preliminary Note reminds us that *De la connaissance de Dieu* appeared in 1945 and again in 1948. The criticisms of reviewers and others, particularly those who thought that the author did not do justice to the Church's teaching on what knowledge of God man can attain by the light of natural reason, led Fr. de Lubac to spend a good deal of time in his augmented edition, *Sur les chemins de Dieu*, in answering them; and this robs the later work of something of its spontaneity. In its English translation a good deal of this over-the-shoulder writing has wisely been dropped, at any rate from the footnotes, and the matter is tidied up in a Postscript.

The Discovery of God is also an anthology because, though much of the book is in the author's words and from his own reflection, much of it is woven from writings of all ages in the Church, and occasionally outside. It is a condensation for us, from the hand of a bibliographical master in this field, of the recurrent themes of Christian thought, the *philosophia perennis*. And yet, if there is one thing Fr. de Lubac seems to have aimed at, it is to put this wealth of Christian reflection in contact, or face to face, at every point with modern intellectual preoccupations. So the result is a live apologetic, exacting at times in its close analysis, but touching many another chord too, and treating explicitly at the opening of Chapter 6 the different approach of the "philosopher" and of the "mystic"—but only in order to remind us that each of us is both. Thus the work escapes the deadening hand of a formal treatise or a closed system, and eludes the critic-in-principle of natural theology. The main theological question to which it gives rise, and which in a sense it answers throughout, is adumbrated in the intentional ambiguity of the French title: Does God find us, or do we find Him?

A reader will discover here a good deal that is to his taste, according to what it is; and probably a good deal that is more to others' taste. A reviewer can give little more than a descriptive account—but of a fascinating book, that one could return to indefinitely.

The translation by Mr. Alexander Dru is lively and tight, and,

though the cast of thought is often indelibly French, the expression of it is never anything but English. But something seems to have gone wrong with: "For God is the Absolute; and nothing can be thought without positing the Absolute in relating it to that Absolute" (p. 40); and surely what Origen meant (p. 139) was, "It entails no small risk to speak even the truth about God."

And that, it appears from the Postscript, is what Fr. de Lubac found himself.

JOHN COVENTRY

FIRST 'LIFE' OF ST. BERNARD

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a first translation into English by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (Mowbray 10s 6d).

THE *Vita Prima* of St. Bernard was the work of three men, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval and Geoffrey of Auxerre. The present translation is the first attempt to render that life into English and should be a welcome addition to most spiritual libraries. However it should have been made clear in the Preface that this is not a translation of the integral text, and some reason for the omissions should have been given. For example, between pp. 69 and 70 of the translation almost three columns of Migne are missing, and the final four pages of William's biography are also omitted. No indication is given either in the text or in the notes that anything has been omitted.

The translation of the Latin used by twelfth-century monastic authors, full as it is of biblical allusion and unsuspected technical terms, presents serious difficulties. The present translators have given themselves a wide margin of liberty and make use of loose paraphrase. To a certain extent that is inevitable; but was it necessary to deprive William's incisive portrait of Bernard as a boy of all its force and savour? *Verecundus* is not fully expressed by "modest and self-effacing." Bernard was in fact a very shy, timid person. *Mire cogitativus* describes another characteristic of Bernard, his extraordinary power of concentration, but it is translated as "so he could give himself to deep thought." There are also a number of serious mistranslations: *praedicatoribus* (P.L. 185, 227D), is rendered by "forerunners," and the quotation from Psalm 84 is so altered as to make nonsense of the whole sentence. Further, when a connoisseur of the spiritual life writes *effugium vanitatis* in the context of Ecclesiastes I, 2 (P.L. 185, 231D), he does not mean "escaping from pride." Such inaccuracies, and unfortunately they are many, make it impossible to accept this translation as a serious or scholarly work. The book has however the value of revealing Bernard, as his contemporaries knew him, to a wider public.

WILLIAM YEOMANS

POEMS

The Gravel Ponds. Poems by Peter Levi, S.J. (André Deutsch 10s 6d).

TWO APPARENTLY OPPOSED THEMES provide the tension, the nervous energy of these poems. The first theme is best expressed in the poem entitled *Over the Roof, High in among the Gloom . . .* which ends with the lines:

and here my mind returns, day and night,
accepting with an instinctive ease
this nest where the mind hangs at peace,
this intellectual liberty and light.

The second theme is exposed in the poem, *What if the World Were a Horrible Mad Fit . . .*:

I would not choose to be masked in any defence
beyond the fight and heat of an animal
and heart's power against heart's pretence.

In almost every poem in Mr. Levi's fine book we are able to see these two themes enacted in a dynamic confrontation of the mind by the senses. But the conflict is one of choice and exultation, not of moral judgment or disapproval. Many of Mr. Levi's poems are written in praise of birds or animals:

A mastered hawk has no disloyalty.

It was a marvellous thing
to see those deer running.

I think of Adam's lions at the stir
of any sleeping beast.

These creatures are real not heraldic, facts not analogies. The mood of the poems in which they appear is not unlike that of Traherne when he wrote, "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars."

The intellectual strength of Mr. Levi's verse lies in a Platonism that is suffused with Christianity. Indeed, this is sometimes the very subject-matter and core of his poetry, as in the poem, *Digenes Akritas*, which ends:

He died, lonely huntsman and gardener,
clear-tongued, taking the Sacrament with tears.
And still Plato's ghost sang in his ears.

These poems, with their glittering imagery, their subtle and sometimes deliberately elusive rhythms, are the expression of a contemplative mind which cares more for the concrete than the abstract. Mr. Levi's work is more truly religious than any number of verses which consciously strive to give contemporary significance to archaic symbols. He is audacious in his inquiries and not afraid when the answers he finds are either ambiguous or else veiled. As he himself has affirmed elsewhere—"What one wanted as a child because of a sense of universal happiness, one wants now because of something like the opposite." When the tensions in Mr. Levi's poems are resolved, they are resolved neither by blind faith nor by cunning craftsmanship but by honesty and compassion.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

NIGHTMARE WORLD

Titus Alone, by Mervyn Peake (Eyre and Spottiswoode 21s).

TITUS GROAN, *Gormenghast*, and now *Titus Alone*! This is indeed a strange trilogy. What is it all about? What all fiction deals with, is the answer, I suppose, namely what goes on in the heart of man. Deep, deep down in the human heart, when that unique prose-poet, Mervyn Peake, unleashes his imagination.

It is a nightmare world that he inhabits; but every nightmare is the creation of a dreamer and therefore a work of art. It is just a question of whether a nightmare is good or bad art. I belong to the admirers of the work of Mervyn Peake and think that he is an exceptionally fine creative artist, not that I would enjoy being surrounded eternally with pictures by Hieronymos Bosch, say, or being compelled to read no novels other than those of Kafka.

A macabre world of near-meaningless ritual, with its schizophrenic *dramatis personae*, is described in the first novel, which ends when Titus Groan becomes seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast at the age of two. The second novel begins with Titus Groan at the age of seven, traces his development up to young-manhood and mirrors the interior forces which make it imperative for him to find a life outside his own domain, which is phosphorescent with decay.

In *Titus Alone*, the hero is propelled into another horrific world, in which he has to struggle to retain his identity or find a new one, without disintegrating. The terrifying thing for the reader about this new world is that, with all its grotesqueries, squalor and distortions, it is recognisably our own world, the world of the mid-twentieth century. What of Titus? The trilogy ends on a note of hope: through sin, suffering and courage, he becomes a mature human being, turns his back on his sterile past which he could have regained, accepts his

new self and, I like to think, sets out on his true pilgrimage—to find his soul as well as his identity.

I have already by implication likened Mervyn Peake's novels to the work of Kafka. They also remind me of Rex Warner's forgotten *tour de force*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, even in places of C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*; but Peake's imaginative writing has a rich quality all its own which should assure him an important place in contemporary English literature.

E. B. STRAUSS

THE ROME OF ST. BENEDICT

Citadel of God, by L. de Wohl (Gollancz 12s).

MOST OF US KNOW that Rome was ruled by pagan emperors till Constantine was converted in A.D. 323. But then comes a gap, save that we may know vaguely that Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, and to many, even St. Augustine, the end of the world seemed to have come. After worse horrors, and the ending of the line of Western Emperors in 476, Gothic kings ruled Italy from Ravenna, and this book begins with the triumphal entry of the Ostrogoth, Theodoric, into a totally demoralised Rome. From its intrigues and debaucheries, a young man called Benedict fled into the mountains and for a while lived unknown as a hermit. From 491 onwards, Theodoric provided Rome with a certain breathing-space, but as he grew old, he became ever more suspicious and cruel. In 526 he forced the Pope, John I, to sail to Byzantium trusting that he would persuade the orthodox emperor Justinian to restore to the Catholics the churches that the Arians had seized. But Catholic East and West embraced each other and John crowned Justinian in Sancta Sophia. When the Pope returned, Theodoric, furious at this turn of events, threw the exhausted old pontiff into prison where in May 526, he died. In August, Theodoric died too, and the murder of his daughter, regent for her young son, determined Justinian to recapture the West. The Goths wore themselves out besieging the City whose wall was impregnable till in 546 the gates near St. John Lateran were treacherously opened to Totila, who entered a Rome resolved to starve rather than surrender. Only five hundred civilians survived there, cowering in churches, and though Justinian's general, Belisarius, stopped Totila from demolishing the walls of Rome, when he left the city there was no one in it at all. Totila lived out the nine stormy years prophesied to him by St. Benedict and then the Goths faded away having created nothing. They were not the originators of "Gothic" architecture and vestments. Gothic was a sneering word invented by Renaissance conceit to describe all that had intervened between itself and the

classic period. It might, then, seem as if this book were about everything save the life of St. Benedict. But when he first began to be written about, legends had had time to form around him, though they were very much of one colour, and true to what his Rule can show us of him. His life remains almost unknown to us even after he had emerged from the cave, where he had become almost indistinguishable from a wild animal, and gained such magnetic influence that even noblemen trusted their sons to his tutelage. He is surrounded with legend until the time when he settled in Monte Cassino. Who would have guessed that this monastery would almost rival Rome in its history of destruction and resurrection? Nothing could stop the civilising streams going forward from Cassino and its daughters. Pilgrimages went singing towards Rome, *Roma nobilis, orbis et domina*, and even in disastrous centuries men would sing, *Par tibi, Roma, nihil cum sis prope tota ruina . . . Plus Caesare Petrus*. They would fall on their knees at the first sight of the campanili of basilicas, projecting above even those fortresses amid the entanglement of brambles in which the half-savage nobles lived, issuing out only to fight one another, or to lay hands on the helpless Holy See. The author has written a vividly romantic piece of history (though we doubt if Maurus was sent to Gaul) in which all the human passions play their parts. And yet the theme almost takes us out of time, so strongly does the sudden jet of spirit force its way across the accumulated débris due to man's insane egoism to our own day. A modern book.

C. C. MARTINDALE

THE ALIENATION OF EUROPE

The Rape of Europe, by Luis Díez del Corral (Allen and Unwin 25s).

THIS BOOK, excellently translated into English by H. V. Livermore, presents the reader with wide vistas of history and society. The main theme is the "expropriation" of European civilisation by non-European peoples and the effect of this expropriation on the destiny of Europe itself. And the symbol chosen by the author for this process of expropriation is the myth of the rape of Europa by the bull, the word "rape" being understood as including in its meaning not only the exercise of force by the assailant but also a measure of acquiescence, even of provocation, on the part of the victim.

In developing his theme the author studies the growth of European civilisation and culture, with frequent glances at the history of non-European peoples. History, art, politics and technology are all considered, and there are discussions of or references to a great number of writers about these subjects. The views of thinkers so diverse as St. Augustine, Bossuet, Vico, Condorcet, Turgot, Hegel, Comte,

Nietzsche, Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, Jaspers and Toynbee are taken into consideration. And I suppose that the book can be said to belong to the class of philosophy of history or philosophy of culture.

The most obvious feature of European civilisation which has been or is being appropriated by, say, the peoples of the East is technology. And we may be inclined to say that this is a superficial, though obviously important, export which carries with it no cultural values. But though the author admits that technology cannot convey all the values and ideals of European culture, he insists that it "does not belong to the epidermis of European culture." On the contrary, it has been nurtured on Europe's "very life blood and its most spiritual aspirations," and it has so developed that "it takes with it, even if only obliquely and implicitly, the most varied impulses, values and ideals of European life."

At the beginning of his chapter on alienation in art the author remarks that our natural impulse is to say that European art has not been expropriated in the way that technology has been. And in a real sense this is true. The Chinese, for instance, are developing technology, under an impulse derived ultimately from the West, but they have their own artistic traditions. But at the end of the chapter the author argues, apropos of the cinema, that "the poor coolie who watches a film to-day sees it without knowing, and obviously without acknowledging, a form of spatiality that was invented in a religious context at Cluny and Speyer, observes things with a form of prehensile attention that was devised by van Eyck and Durer, and feels his soul stirred by a drama in which the vigorous pulse of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, Goethe and Balzac, still beats." True, some countries try to use the cinema as an ideological instrument for their own ends, but the viewers cannot help absorbing attitudes towards art which are of Western origin. Whether one is inclined to agree or disagree with this line of thought, it obviously opens up fascinating avenues of reflection.

What of the future? The author does not set himself up as a prophet. But at the same time he does not draw the conclusion that Europe is necessarily done for, in the sense that it has already fulfilled its cultural mission and has no further task to perform. In his opinion Europe alone has the breadth of vision, the experience and the degree of integration of the various sectors of life which are required "to actualise the old and imperishable storehouse of ancient and Christian humanism." As for Christianity, the author is non-committal. He refers frequently to the secularisation of the Christian inspiration and dynamism which has made Christianity exportable, so to speak, in derivative and not specifically religious forms. Yet Christianity itself is alive and actual. It may turn out that the expropriation of European

civilisation is the precursor of a world-wide expansion of the Christian religion. But it may not.

As I have said, the book opens up wide vistas. Perhaps the vistas are too broad for the type of historian who dislikes generalisation which borders on philosophy of history. But we need books like this from time to time. They help us to take stock; they help to broaden our vision and stimulate us to reflection. If we already have an overall picture of our own, we may prefer it to that presented by the author. But even in this case we become more determinately conscious of our own picture and why we hold to it. And if we have no overall picture, the writer may help us to form one. In any case there is room, to vary the metaphor, for large-scale as well as for small-scale maps.

FREDERICK C. COPLESTON

UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCES

Religion is Reasonable, by Thomas Corbishley, S.J. (Burns and Oates 16s).

A NUMBER of useful aspects of religion are covered in this book, which ranges from the rational basis for religion to the formation of the visible Church and the exposition of certain fundamental doctrines. Fr. Corbishley obviously understands the specific demands of the undergraduate. He deals succinctly with the possibility of proving truth by reason, with the problem of evil and the chance of salvation outside the Church, all of which are current controversies among undergraduates. But, inevitably, there is much simplification. The meticulously logical progression of thought makes these chapters most interesting reading, but when the theories of Kant and the logical positivists are put to the test, one gets, perhaps too easily, the impression that their propositions are shattered simply by the application of common sense. One is left with a desire to hear a few more arguments on their side.

It will be a disappointment to some readers that there is no sense of discovery in some chapters, because from the beginning Fr. Corbishley has been arguing from Christian terms of reference. In the chapter on truth and reason, before any sort of position has been argued out, we are told, "Reason is all in favour of God; it is atheism which is the rationalisation." It would be refreshing if Catholics writing on the preamble to the faith would not assume that their argument is proved before they have themselves established anything.

This is a most readable book; the language is always precise and the individual conferences form well-constructed entities, each covering considerable ground. Fr. Corbishley has the knack of putting things

in a lively way, as well as of making points that one had not noticed before, *e.g.*, showing how Christ stands out from other great men such as Socrates, Buddha and Krishna, because He is not merely building on an old religious or ethical system, but originating, revealing new truths, commanding allegiance.

Fr. Corbishley has drawn up in some detail the context of Christian life. It would have been helpful if he had written a concluding chapter on the theme of holiness, relating it to its background of ordinary life. Undergraduates tend to isolate "holiness" as something too difficult to attain, and to regard purely rational investigation into religion as an end in itself. Perhaps they should be helped to understand that unless the aim of intellectual pursuit is a greater sharing in the life of Christ, it is purposeless.

GEMMA FENTON

SHORTER NOTICES

Dialectical Materialism, by Gustav A. Wetter (Routledge 52s 6d).

Back to Life, edited by Robert Conquest (Hutchinson 15s).

From Karl Marx to Jesus Christ, by Ignace Lepp (Sheed and Ward 15s).

IN RECENT YEARS, a good many ex-Communists have written their conversion stories, not all by any means with equal effect. There have been opportunists among them and their mark is always on their writing. There have also been idealists. Few amongst these have touched the heights reached by Douglas Hyde in his *I Believed*. The transparent sincerity of that book left an indelible mark on the mind. Its impact came from its driving idealism. Hyde sought in Communism the fulfilment of a spiritual ideal. In the end he found frustration. His pages showed powerfully that Communism would draw to itself few of his stamp if Christians were sufficiently alive to their duty.

Fr. Lepp's book is in the same tradition as Hyde's. Like Hyde he came to Communism as an idealist. His story is that of a man who left everything to spread to the poor the good tidings he thought were contained in the Communist creed. Like Hyde, Fr. Lepp found that Communism finished in frustration: he saw that Communism could only end in the crushing of personality. He left the party, began his quest again and found his grail in the Catholic priesthood. His is a brave tale.

Fr. Lepp was fortunate to be able to extricate himself from the tangle into which Communism had taken his life. Less fortunate are those who have to endure its external pressure against their will. For the inhabitants of Russia's satellites there is, so often, no hope of

extrication. They can but strive to maintain their integrity, often at great and heroic cost to themselves. Recently, Robert Conquest, who knows Soviet Russia well, published a collection of poems written in the Iron Curtain countries, for the most part during 1956. They reveal more clearly than anything else we know, the depth of the longing of Russia's captive peoples to be free. Nothing shows more strikingly than these lines the frustration brought by Communism to the spirit of man.

One says this, whilst recognising, at the same time, the fascination held out to some minds by the systematic ideology which Communism undoubtedly is. Fr. Wetter's critique of it is one of the finest pieces of analysis that has been accomplished in our time. It would be impertinent to write anything else of the work of a master.

The Cunning of the Dove, by Alfred Duggan (Faber 16s).

A CASE might be made for two parallel history books, one composed entirely of sources, and the other in the shape of a novel, the skeleton of which could be tested by reference to the book of ascertained facts. Mr. Duggan, who is astonishingly learned in Roman and English history alike, has chosen to write the novel and does not give us a source-book. On the whole he is brave enough not to write in bogus-archaic style and he usually avoids using modern colloquialisms. The boy Edgar tells how he became page to Emma, widow of Ethelred and then of Canute. When Edward, son of Ethelred, was acclaimed king, Edgar in course of time became his favourite servant and later his chamberlain. If, as the story proceeds, we get confused, that is because English history itself was a confusion, chiefly owing to the Danish invasions, but hardly less because of the internecine jealousies of the great earls. It may prove simplest to concentrate on two topics; the character of King Edward, and the benefit or harm done to our national form of civilisation by the Norman conquest. We ourselves are, on the balance, entirely on the side of the Norman. As for the king, he provides an example of the contraries that can co-exist in saints. His deep spirit of prayer never quenched his passion for hunting; he was gentle and truly cared for the poorer people of his realm, and yet his temper could blaze fiercely under provocation. Convinced that he ought not to leave England, he begged Rome to commute his vow of a pilgrimage to the Eternal City, and that is why we now possess Westminster Abbey. Would that Catholics here acquired once more the habit of paying homage at his shrine, as well as at Walsingham and Canterbury.

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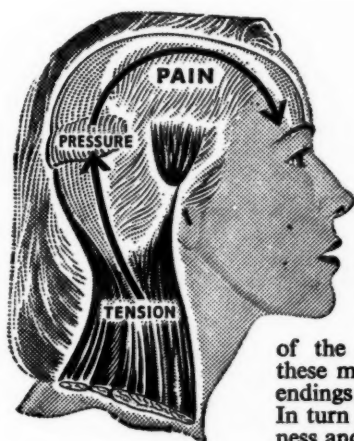
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ONE of the great occupational risks of business life under the pressure of to-day is that the practical man of affairs neglects his outside reading, and all too easily falls into a narrow circle of immediate preoccupations. There is always loss in this, and the Catholic business or professional man, as a member of the Church Universal, has a particularly strong reason for keeping his mind open to wider horizons. Certainly it was never more necessary than now to follow world happenings. A direct chain of causes and effects ties every business to economical changes in the world, which are themselves as often the consequence as the cause of changes in men's political and social ideas. These ideas in their turn come out of the religions, or irreligions, of contemporary man.

In many countries the Catholic Church is at the heart of the battle of ideas. Cardinal Manning's saying that "all great quarrels between men are at bottom theological" suggests that there is, in fact, no better starting-point or background for understanding the modern world than a Catholic one. Because of this approach and background

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